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UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICIES ON IRAN AND IRAQ, AND THE
NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE KURDISH NATIONALIST MOVEMENT: FROM
THE NIXON ERA THROUGH THE REAGAN YEARS

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

by

JANET A. FRANKLIN
B.A., Antioch University, 1990

2019
Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

April 30, 2019

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION BY Janet A. Franklin ENTITLED United States Foreign Policies on
Iran and Iraq, and the Negative Impact on the Kurdish Nationalist Movement: From the
Nixon Era through the Reagan Years BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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ABSTRACT

Franklin, Janet A. M.A. Department of History, Wright State University, 2019. United States Foreign Policies on Iran and Iraq, and the Negative Impact on the Kurdish Nationalist Movement: From the Nixon Era through the Reagan Years.

United States foreign policies on Iran and Iraq, during the later Cold War period, led to devastating consequences to Iraqi Kurdish aspirations for autonomy and a separate nation-state. By employing the Shah of Iran as one pillar of America's proxy in the Persian Gulf, and after the Iranian Revolution, to then begin collaborating with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, U.S. policies marginalized and negatively impacted Iraqi Kurds' goal of independence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Iraqi Kurds began lining up in front of polling places throughout the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, at 8 a.m. (local time) on September 25, 2017. Armed with fresh victories against ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) forces while assisting the Iraqi government win back territory lost to that militant group, the Iraqi Kurds felt their time had once again arrived to assert for self-governance. The September 2017 election called for a vote on an advisory referendum, which would give the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) a mandate to achieve independence from Iraq.¹ Overwhelmingly approved by 92.73 percent of the 3,305,925 eligible voters, the Iraqi Kurds felt sure they secured the pathway towards self-rule.² Instead of accepting the legal right of expression, as exercised by the people of the Kurdistan Region in passing the advisory referendum, the Iraqi government deemed the vote unconstitutional and considered the move as a crime.³ Taking further action, Iraq sent forces into the region seizing the city of Kirkuk and other towns and cities, along with multiple oil fields, in the semi-autonomous region.⁴ The United States, yet again, stood aside with the view that an

¹ Tamara Qiblawi, “Iraqi Kurdish referendum: What you need to know,” *CNN*, Erbil, Iraq, updated 5:10 PM ET, Sun September 24, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/24/middleeast/kurdish-referendum/index.html> (accessed May 4, 2019).

² KRG Cabinet, “KHERC: Yes wins by 92.73 percent at Kurdistan independence referendum,” Kurdistan Regional Government, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (cabinet.gov.krd), Thu, 28 Sep 2017 15:00, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=040000&l=12&a=55861> (accessed May 4, 2019).

³ KRG Cabinet, “KRG Council of Ministers statement on Baghdad’s unconstitutional acts,” Kurdistan Regional Government, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (cabinet.gov.krd), Fri, 29 Sep 2017 11:40, <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=040000&l=12&a=55878> (accessed May 4, 2019).

⁴ Jane Arraf, “After Iraqi Kurdish Independence Vote Backfires, ‘I Do Not Regret It,’ Says Barzani,” *NPR, Politics & Policy*, November 7, 2017, 1:11 PM ET, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/11/07/562514981/after-iraqi-kurdish-independence-vote-backfires-i-do-not-regret-it-says-barzani> (accessed May 4, 2019).

autonomous Kurdistan Region would destabilize the entire Middle East.⁵ Although a supporter of Iraqi Kurdish fighters against ISIS, the U.S. remained diplomatically detached and offered no advocacy for Kurdish statehood.⁶ A continuing pattern, the United States once more employed the Iraqi Kurds in fighting a perceived U.S. threat in the Persian Gulf region, currently ISIS, but averted the Iraqi Kurds' long held quest for a separate nation-state. Much of the deterrents to Kurdish self-rule in Iraq are enmeshed in policies established and imposed by American interventions in the region. This study examines American foreign relations with Iran and Iraq, during the Nixon administration through the Reagan era, and the detrimental impact American policy had on the aspirations of Iraqi Kurds for statehood. During this period, Iran shifted from ally to foe; conversely, Iraq transformed from being a Cold War opponent to a collaborator. The shifts in American foreign policies on Iran and Iraq marginalized and negatively impacted Iraqi Kurds' goal of independence.

⁵ Krishnadev Calamur, "Why Doesn't the U.S. Support Kurdish Independence?" *The Atlantic, Global*, Oct 20, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/us-kurdish-independence/543540/> (accessed May 4, 2019).

⁶ Calamur, "Why Doesn't U.S. Support Kurdish Independence."



Figure 1. *Autonomous Region*

Kurdistan. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/Autonomous_Region_Kurdistan-en.png/375px-Autonomous_Region_Kurdistan-en.png

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature, scholars of American foreign policy throughout the Cold War era have tended to depict the Kurdish nationalist movement as incidental in comparison to state actors. Rashid Khalidi, Michael A. Palmer, Daniel J. Sargent, and Odd Arne Westad represent a few researchers that discuss the Cold War period and mention the Kurds in terms of their ancillary roles in the wars between Iran and Iraq. In Iran, for example, academics perceived the Kurds as constituting a segment of the overall Iranian population. Research into U.S.-Iranian relations treated the Kurds as one

minority group of several under the jurisdiction of the Iranian government, and treatment of U.S.-Kurdish relations resided as subset of the larger U.S.-Iranian policy. The Iraqi Kurds were viewed in a similar manner. Although recognition of the nationalist movement played a minor role in U.S.-Iraqi relations, the Iraqi Kurds held a negligible position to the larger U.S. policy on Iraq. The materials utilized in this examination draw primarily from United States foreign policies on Iran and Iraq to elucidate the resulting effects on the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq. Sources in this study, gathered from U.S. government documents, American newspaper articles, and books, address a series of questions that explore the changing dynamics of U.S.-Iranian and U.S.-Iraqi relations from 1969-1988, and how the shifts obstructed Iraqi Kurdish aims for statehood.

Prior to America's 2011 withdrawal from Iraq after the Iraq War (2003-2011), the region of Kurdistan subsisted geographically, economically, and politically marginalized. The Kurdistan region also lacked formal institutions to compile and house historical documents and artifacts, which hampered comprehensive inquiry. More important, however, the provocative, rebellious behavior of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the associated countries created enormous difficulties in obtaining research materials, and thus made scholarship difficult. The end of the Iraq War and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime opened previously unavailable research opportunities by providing a safer environment and more open lines of communication between Iraqi Kurdistan and the West.

One of the few researchers to explore the direct connection between the United States and the Kurds was Marianna Charountaki, an international relations scholar. Her book, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International relations in the Middle East since*

1945, examined U.S.-Kurdish relations by primarily focusing on the Kurd's influence on American foreign policy from World War II until Gulf War III (March 2003).

Charountaki's expanded edition of her Ph.D. thesis (2009) concentrated on the interdependence of non-state and state actors in international relations. She explained the Kurdish issue as multifaceted and complex in nature with internal and external dimensions that are dependent on the regional state powers.⁷ Charountaki analyzed the structure of American foreign policy making, particularly in how the formulating of policy related to non-state powers, in this case the Kurds, within the paradigm of increasing globalization.⁸ In covering a span of fifty eight years, she discussed pertinent periods of discourse and action to include the first direct meeting between U.S. government officials and Kurdish leaders in 1972, and the 1988 U.S. Congressional Bill authorizing sanctions against Iraq for the use of chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurds. Charountaki also covered the Kurds in Turkey and Syria, and delineated how the Kurdish groups in each of the four countries have frequently been at odds, often exacerbated by regional and international powers.⁹ She relied on interviews with pertinent KDP, PUK, and KRG members and other Kurdish officials, U.S. governmental electronic sources, and U.S. congressional records and reports, along with periodicals, newspapers, and other media.

While Charountaki discussed the Kurdish Issue in international relations terms, Mehrdad R. Izady and David McDowall chronicled the history of the Kurds. Izady's *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* offered a primer on the Kurds, presenting a full range of

⁷ Marianna Charountaki, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International relations in the Middle East since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 28.

⁸ Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 70.

⁹ Ibid., 182.

themes from geographical information to cultural and arts material. Although the book lacked a comprehensive bibliography, Izady incorporated documentation on the ancient and modern sources he used at the end of each chapter. Notably, Izady delineated all of the Kurdish tribes and utilized his cartography skills to include numerous maps. In addition, he presented detailed information on Kurdish religions, and described the high status given women in the Cult of Angels, which is one of several indigenous Kurdish faiths. Also, he defined the importance of women in politics and the military. In a section on the Kurdish national character, Izady attributed the faults of Mullah Mustafa Barzani to less admirable traits of the Kurds in general.

Where Izady lacked information on contemporary political developments, McDowall's *The Modern History of the Kurds* chronicled the history of the Kurds concentrating on the nineteenth through the late twentieth century. McDowall paid particular attention to the nationalist movement, citing primary sources from the Public Record office in Great Britain and the United Nations, and incorporated secondary sources to include newspapers and periodicals. In detail, McDowall reported on the internal struggles and rivalries within Kurdish society, along with the convergence of old tribal systems within the changing dynamics of newly established modern states. Similar to Charountaki, McDowall highlighted the complexities of the nationalist movement within the context of regional governments, but he concentrated on the Kurdish perspective with comprehensive narratives on the development and interplay of the numerous nationalist movement groups. McDowall, in his third edition of *The Modern History of the Kurds*, included appendices on the Kurds in Syria, Lebanon, and the Caucasus, which largely are absent from other studies.

The works of Marianna Charountaki, Mehrdad R. Izady, and David McDowall primarily covered the Kurds and the overall Kurdish nationalist movement. Ofra Bengio's *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State Within a State* offered an examination of the Iraqi Kurdish drive for autonomy, and discussed the role the Kurdish movement played in shaping the ultimate collapse of the Ba'athist regime. Exploring the internal and external deterrents to Kurdish nation building, Bengio assessed the degree to which the Iraqi Kurds succeeded. Bengio utilized sources from British and Ba'athist archives; Iraqi and Kurdish newspapers; and, Ba'ath and Kurdish documents, speeches by public figures, and official declarations to argue that the Iraqi Kurds continue to hold a crucial role in Iraq's state building, especially after the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett's *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, a comprehensive study ranging from 1958 through 1991, chronologically surveyed the history, politics, and international relations of Iraq. While Bengio emphasized the impact of the Kurds on Iraqi politics, Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett provided a more comprehensive view on Iraq, giving particular attention to the Iraqi Communist Party, fluctuating policies concerning the Kurds and Shi'a, and regional tensions. The Slugletts posited that the attitudes of the various Iraqi administrations towards the Kurds were pragmatic and contentious in nature. While different regimes attempted variously to incorporate the movement leaders into coalition governments, offer a form of Kurdish autonomy, and force displacement of the Iraqi Kurds, the Slugletts offered a neutral position on the nationalist movement. They neither described the Kurds as victims nor as glorified rebels. The Slugletts used unpublished theses,

newspapers, and an array of secondary sources, along with their own research, to present a socioeconomic history of Iraq.

Phebe Marr's third edition of *The Modern History of Iraq* also reviewed the history of Iraq, but highlighted Iraq's pursuit of a national identity and struggle for modernity. Marr began her study with the monarchical period (1921), after providing a brief historical synopsis of the land and people of Iraq, and carried her examination through 2011. Contributing to the current literature on Iraq by scrutinizing economic and social changes occurring during the twentieth century, Marr delved into the relationships between Sunni and Shi'a, and Arab and Kurd, along with the political dimensions enmeshed in the development of the state. She described the Kurdish nationalist movement, in balanced terms, as one of several factors eroding national unity. Marr capitalized on her own research, memoirs, works in Arabic, as well as English and other Western languages sources.

Taking a slightly different approach to Marr, Tripp's second edition of *A History of Iraq* examined the country through the lenses of patrimonialism, the political economy of oil, and the use of violence in the making of modern day Iraq. According to Tripp, "Indeed, control of the means of violence has been one of the lures for those who seized the state apparatus."¹⁰ Tripp discussed the military and economic power of the Sunni Arab minority over the majority Shi'a and Kurdish populations, often with severe consequences. He demonstrated the use of governmental violence against the citizenry by relating the experiences of the Iraqi Kurds to include forceful expulsions, mass executions, and gassing of whole villages. Tripp utilized archival records housed in

¹⁰ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

England, India, and the United States, and cited numerous memoirs and secondary sources in his narrative.

The perspectives presented by the preceding authors centered on the Iraqi Kurds and Iraq, specifically the Kurdish influence in the region. Roham Alvandi's *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* took a different position that assessed U.S.-Iranian relations, which implicated the Kurdish nationalist movement during the Shatt al-'Arab border dispute (1969-1975). Alvandi challenged the view that the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was America's proxy in the Persian Gulf region. He posited that the Shah developed a partnership with President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, then National Security Advisor, to contain Soviet influence and establish Iran as the regional leader. Alvandi illuminated the view from Tehran of U.S.-Iranian relations and the crucial role the Iraqi Kurds played in the Shah's political maneuverings.¹¹ He used Persian-language sources, declassified presidential papers, and documents produced by Kissinger and Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence (1966-1973) to assert his viewpoint.

Bryan R. Gibson's *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* asserted that U.S. policy toward Iraq, between 1958 and 1975, was based on Cold War concerns and denying Soviet influence in the country. He demonstrated how reliance on the *Pike Report*, the findings of the 1975 Pike Committee, headed by U.S. Representative Otis G. Pike, distorted historians perception of the events during the period. The report claimed that secret U.S. financial support was given to the Iraqi Kurds. Gibson used declassified government materials, interviews with government

¹¹ Janet A. Franklin, "Final Essay: *The First Exploitation of the Kurds by the United States: 1972*" (HST 7330-01, December 17, 2015), 2.

officials, and numerous secondary sources to redress historiographical deficiencies, and to provide a more accurate account of how U.S. decisions and actions were based on a “single, unifying perception: the Soviet Union posed a threat to Iraq’s sovereignty.”¹²

Bruce W. Jentleson’s *With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990* maintained that the policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations towards Iraq were based on flawed assumptions. Where Gibson highlighted weaknesses in historiography, Jentleson asserted that both presidents made conjectures based on the premise that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”¹³ According to Jentleson, Reagan and Bush devised policies on the basic presumption that Saddam Hussein would pivot towards the United States during the period of the Iran-Iraq War, and by doing so, provide regional stability by ceasing to instigate terrorism and playing a role in Arab-Israeli peace settlements. Jentleson employed government documents, interviews, hearing transcripts, and newspaper articles to present his argument.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the subject of how United States foreign policies in Iran and Iraq negatively impacted the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq during the administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. By chronologically examining the policy decisions employed during the sixteen year period, a picture emerged of the detrimental effects of those strategies on the Iraqi Kurds’ ambition for statehood. The primary sources used in this paper include declassified government documents electronically obtained from the Foreign Relations of the United States and the Central Intelligence Agency’s Freedom of

¹² Bryan R. Gibson, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), xxii.

¹³ Bruce W. Jentleson, *With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 15.

Information Act Electronic Reading Room, and electronic copies of reports obtained from the United Nations Security Council. In addition, articles from *the village VOICE* and the *New York Times* offered pertinent government disclosures, and interviews with federal and military officials, respectively, from the Nixon and Reagan administrations. The memoirs of Richard M. Nixon and Henry Kissinger provide first hand perspectives of key government officials from the beginning of direct U.S.-Kurdish relations. The materials utilized in this examination bring to light an evolving U.S. strategy in policy making concerning the region.

II. THE KURDS

“No friends but the mountains” is a common refrain heard expressed about, and by, the Kurds. The Zagros Mountains, extending from southeast Turkey, through northeast Iraq, and running down along the western border of Iran to the Strait of Hormuz, offered sanctuary to the various Kurdish tribes in times of conquests, conflicts, and threats from perceived enemies for more than four millennia. Although they are one of a multitude of groups worldwide pursuing independence and statehood, such as the Palestinians, the Basque, the Tibetans, and the Rohingyas, the Kurds assert a special distinction as being “the world’s largest ethnic group without their own homeland,” according to The Kurdish Project, a digital based cultural-education initiative to raise awareness of Kurdish people.¹⁴ The northern regions of the Zagros, an inhospitable expanse, provided the Kurds with not only shelter, but allowed for the continuation of their semi-nomadic lifestyle.

Claiming lineage from the ancient Medes, a people of Indo-Iranian origin, whom they proudly proclaim ancestry in the Kurdish national anthem, the Kurds are more likely an intermingling of various peoples moving through the Kurdistan region in prehistoric times.¹⁵ One of several Kurdish origin myths include the Kurds descending from

¹⁴ The Kurdish Project, “Latest News, For Iraq’s Long-Suffering Kurds, Independence Beckons,” posted September 11, 2017, <https://thekurdishproject.org/latest-news/iraqs-long-suffering-kurds-independence-beckons/> (accessed September 29, 2017).

¹⁵ Dildar (Yonis Reuf), “Ey Reqîb (Kurdish national anthem),” Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iraq, KDP International Site, <http://www.kdp.se/lder.html> (accessed October 1, 2017).

children who escaped into the mountains to hide from Zahhak, a child-eating monster.¹⁶ Another legend claims the Kurds are the progenies of *jinn*, supernatural creatures, and slave girls from King Solomon's court driven into the mountains by the angry king.¹⁷ Called Cyrtii in the second century, a name initially applied to Seleucid or Parthian mercenary slinger (those trained in using slings as weapons), it is unclear if the term specified a distinctive linguistic or ethnic group.¹⁸ But by the seventh century CE, at the beginning of the Islamic era, the Arabs who conquered the region started using the term "Kurds," which held a socio-economic meaning, to refer to the area's mountain people. Among leading Muslim historians in the tenth century CE, the use of "Kurds" to refer to the Zagros inhabitants became more widespread, thus helping to propagate the name.¹⁹ Essentially, the Kurds are an Indo-European speaking people, closely related culturally and linguistically to the Iranian peoples.²⁰ As a non-Arab ethnic group, they inhabit a contiguous area of southeastern Turkey, western Iran, northern Syria, and northern Iraq.

While many languages are spoken in the Kurdish regions, the main Kurdish dialects are Kurmanji, Sorani, and Southern Kurdish. Kurmanji, used most prevalently in the northern sections of Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan, Syria, and Turkey, is spoken by approximately 65 percent of all Kurds. In Iraq, Kurmanji is known as "Behdini."²¹ Sorani is commonly spoken in parts of Iraq and Iran. According to The Kurdish Project, less than 25 percent of all Kurds speak Sorani, but it is "the dialect with the most well

¹⁶ David McDowall, *The Modern History of the Kurds*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2000), 4.

¹⁷ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: the Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

¹⁸ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 9.

¹⁹ Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State Within a State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2012), 2.

²⁰ Gunter, *Kurds Ascending*, 1.

²¹ The Kurdish Project, <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-culture/kurdish-language/> (accessed January 29, 2018).

developed literary tradition in modern times.”²² The regions with Sorani speakers allowed for the dialect to be taught and used in the educational systems, hence the advancement of Sorani literary. Southern Kurdish, the third regional dialect, is comprised of nine subdialects spoken in Iran and parts of Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), established in 1992 as a Parliamentary Democracy within the federated Republic of Iraq, recognizes both Kurmanji and Sorani.²³

Similar to the differences in languages, various religions are practiced among the Kurds to include Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The majority of Kurds identify as Sunni Muslims with a minority being Shi’a, or approximately 15 percent of the total Kurdish population.²⁴ Alevism, a branch of Shi’a Islam that incorporates Sufism, the mystical element of Islam, is also practiced by a small segment of Kurds, particularly in Turkey. An even smaller group of Kurds adhere to Yezidism, a conglomeration of ancient pagan beliefs, Zoroastrianism and Mithraism, Manichaeism (founded by the Iranian prophet Mani, c. 216-276 CE), and superimposed with elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.²⁵ Until the creation of Israel, the region of Kurdistan held a significant minority of Kurdish Jews, but most emigrated to Israel after World War II.²⁶ Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Christian organizations in Europe and the United States revived interest in carrying missionary work to the Kurdistan region.²⁷

²² The Kurdish Project

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 11.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis International Publishers, 1992), 162.

²⁷ Izady, *Kurds*, 164.

Today, approximately 25 to 35 million Kurds live in the region of Kurdistan, and make up the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East.²⁸ In Iraq, the Kurdish population is estimated to be 15 to 20 percent of the total populace. The region of Iraqi Kurdistan, located in the north of Iraq and often referred to as Southern Kurdistan, is governed by the KRG. Its capital is Erbil. Today, the KRG and the U.S. enjoy an open and favorable relationship.



Figure 2. *Map of Iraq*. <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iraq.html>

²⁸ “Who are the Kurds?” *BBC News*, October 31, 2017, under “News World Middle East,” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440> (accessed December 3, 2017).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, of which the Kurds were a part, marked the beginning of greater Western influence in the territories formerly occupied by the caliphate. Sensing an eventual victory in World War I, the United Kingdom and France with approval from the Russian Empire, secretly agreed to the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), an arrangement that allocated spheres of influence and control in the Ottoman controlled regions of the Middle East. After the war's end, the Allied Powers formulated a partitioning plan, The Treaty of Sevres (1920), based on the Sykes-Picot. The agreement incorporated a provision for an independent Kurdistan, but disputes over boundary lines and a Turkish rebellion nullified the treaty. Consequently, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) officially formalized the division of the former empire, and divided up the Kurdistan region leaving the Kurds without a self-ruled state. Instead, Kurdish territory was allocated to Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.²⁹ During the post war negotiations, the majority of Kurds had not fully rallied around a political, nationalist leader or unified around a common nationalistic cause. A newly emerging non-tribal educated professional class had not yet marshalled the Kurds as a unified people to advocate for a separate, autonomous state.³⁰ Tribal structure, intertribal differences, and poor communications factored greatly into the state of Kurdish affairs.

The interwar period, from the Treaty of Lausanne to the onset of World War II, found the appointed central governments controlling the Kurdistan regions attempting to crush, suppress, or mute Kurdish political power and nationalist activities. Pockets of Kurdish resistance to regional authorities persisted, as it had during the Ottoman reign,

²⁹ Gunter, *Kurds Ascending*, 11-12.

³⁰ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 151.

but fresh uncertainties rising from the evolving political realities of the new regimes now in control magnified the struggle. The Treaty of Sevres had, after all, acknowledged Kurdish aims for an independent state on an international level. As with many entities forming new power bases, a jostling for authority and control often leads to greater marginalization of groups that previously held sway or some form of influence. The Kurds exemplified that struggle to hold on to the little autonomy they possessed.

During the Ottoman period, the Kurds had established some semblance of self-rule within the central power structure, although they continued to push for greater independence. The newly recognized governments of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq wrestled with how to address their Kurdish populations within the regional dynamics existing at the time. The main objective in both Turkey and Iran rested on exerting central authority throughout the entire state. Turkey expunged all references to Kurdistan from official records, renamed Kurdish places in Turkish, demanded the sole use of Turkish in courts of law, and officially barred the use of Kurdish dialects in schools.³¹ As well, the Turkish government embarked on a program of resettling Kurds in non-Kurdish western regions of the country.³² Clearly, the aim of Turkey's government centered on creating a single national identity—Turkish—to strengthen its position. The measures were intended to assimilate the Kurds into the national Turkish character and deny them a Kurdish identity, but the actions of the government had the opposite effect. Instead, the push for a Turkish national identity helped intensify the Kurdish nationalist movement. Because of the denial of a Kurdish identity, along with a lack of any economic development in Turkey's Kurdistan region after the war, a Kurdish nationalist movement

³¹ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 191-192.

³² Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 45.

there developed along different lines. As such, this paper addresses only the Kurdish nationalist movement as it pertains to Iraqi Kurds.

KURDS IN IRAN

In Iran, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds experienced a similar, but less severe, pattern of treatment as the Turkish Kurds. The Iranian central government, a theocratic regime led by Reza Shah Pahlavi, held that the Kurds shared Persian ancestry, therefore no overt need to extinguish Kurdish identity. But that common ancestry still excluded Iranian Kurds, who made up approximately 7 percent of the Iranian population, from participation in politics, and the prohibition of the Kurdish dialects in education, publications, and public speech.³³ As Reza Shah amassed his power, he put into place new policies that forced young men into conscription, demanded a uniform European dress code, changed land registration laws to favor local aghas (tribal chieftains or village leaders), prohibited tribal migration, and attempted to disarm the tribes on the border regions.³⁴ He also embarked on modernization programs that benefited urban areas, but left the mountainous countryside untouched. In essence, Reza Shah enacted strict measures to subordinate the Kurds to central authority. Again, the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iran diverged from that experienced in other regions of Kurdistan, thus a discussion on Iranian Kurds will give way to the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement.

KURDS IN IRAQ

In Iraq, created under British mandate in 1921, the Kurds fared better than their counterparts in other regions of Kurdistan. Although the Kurds assumed autonomy

³³ Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 17-18.

³⁴ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 224-225.

would be granted through the Treaty of Sevres, Turkey's rebellion and subsequent independence left the treaty unratified and placed into question the jurisdiction of the Kurdish vilayet (province) of Mosul. In the debate on the disposition of Mosul, the British questioned their initial backing of an independent Kurdish state, which would incorporate the vilayet, and what that would do to the stability of an emerging pro-Western Turkey. Also, London knew of significant oil fields in the Mosul region. At that time, oil was just becoming an ever more crucial commodity that Western powers deemed necessary for the security. If Mosul went to Turkey, it would mean losing the most oil productive region of Iraq. Unsure of placing the province in an independent and unpredictable Kurdish state, the prevailing thought in Britain eventually determined that without Mosul, Iraq would suffer economically and put British interests at risk.³⁵ When British-Turkish negotiations failed to reach an agreement on the vilayet, the Council of the League of Nations, in 1926, conferred Mosul to Iraq with stipulations benefiting the Kurds, specifically the Local Languages Law, allowing both Arabic and Kurdish as the official languages, and political representation in the region.³⁶ Unfortunately for the Iraqi Kurds, those guarantees failed to materialize in practice. Nonetheless, for the first time, the Iraqi government acknowledged Kurdish cultural rights and separate identity. By the time Iraq gained independence from Britain in 1932, numerous Kurdish tribal uprisings befell the country as the Kurds rebelled against British and Arab rule. While Iraqi Kurds' independent state folded before it had a chance to materialize, their ambitions for self-governance continued.

³⁵ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*, 70.

³⁶ Ibid., 72.

During the same period, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq experienced tense relations with one another as the Kurds used the porous borders to escape from the battles and skirmishes they initiated, mainly against Iraq. The fleeing Kurds used the neighboring territories as bases of operations and to regroup. As such, Turkey feared Iranian incursions into Turkish territory to retaliate against the revolting Kurds concealed there, while Iran felt threatened that the British in Iraq would do the same to them.³⁷ Initially, each country utilized the Kurds to cause trouble with their neighbors. In July 1937, however, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq agreed to a pact of cooperation and to abide by existing borders, thus ending the practice of inciting the Kurds against each other.³⁸ The agreement added another layer of difficulty for the Kurds struggling for autonomy as their ability to freely flee across open borders no longer existed.

REBELLIOUS KURDS

While new state governments were dealing with their rebellious Kurdish minorities, the Kurds were fighting internally among themselves. Various tribes were contesting the influence of neighboring clans and pushing back against the current order of affairs. Historically, tribalism played an integral part in the governance of the Kurdistan region. Also, a new class of Kurdish urban intellectuals began questioning the authority of tribal aghas and attempted to diminish rural power. At the same time, within tribal groups, rival chiefs vied for control. Several Kurdish tribal leaders pushed for greater political autonomy within their newly ascribed regions, while others preferred to acquiesce to central authorities for the potential advantages of siding with the new governments of Turkey and Iraq, and in Iran.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 226.

Kurdish tribes possessed relative autonomy under Ottoman rule. With the collapse of the empire, a few Kurdish tribal leaders saw an opportunity to press for self-rule. Shaikh Sa'id, a chief of the Sunni Naqshbandi Sufi order, led a rebellion against the nascent republic of Turkey in 1925.³⁹ In Iran, Ismail Agha Simko, chief of the Shakkak tribe, conducted several uprisings from 1920 to 1930, when he finally succumbed to Iranian forces.⁴⁰ Shaikh Mahmoud of the Barzanji tribe, declared himself king of an independent Kurdistan, in the Sulaymaniyah region, in 1922. Although the British made Mahmoud governor of Sulaymaniyah for a short period of time, from 1922 until 1924, his ultimate goal centered on creating an autonomous state. Shaikh Mahmoud's ambitions unsettled other Kurdish tribal leaders who saw his form of governance no less authoritarian than that of the British or Iraqis. After a forceful removal by British and Iraqi forces, Mahmoud continued to harass British and Iraqi authorities from an Iranian base until his final capture in 1932. Unable to unify around a single, charismatic leader with political savvy to rally the numerous tribes around a nationalist movement, the Kurds lost out to larger, regional powers.

IMPORTANCE OF OIL AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE COLD WAR

After World War I and the lead up to World War II, American interests in the Middle East hinged on commercial interests rather than on security concerns. Oil, the new source of energy, powered the military victory of the Allies in the Great War and helped shape the division of the region afterwards. The United States neither declared war on the Ottomans nor participated in the League of Nations Treaty, and therefore

³⁹ Izady, *Kurds*, 61.

⁴⁰ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*, 17.

reaped no benefits from the mandate system.⁴¹ Instead, the U.S. deferred to Great Britain's political and military dominance in the Middle East, while at the same time hoping to capitalize on the economic benefits from oil revenues. Although the U.S. remained the largest producer and exporter of oil, American oil companies wanted in on the commercial activities being negotiated in the Persian Gulf.⁴² With the outbreak of World War II, the subsequent decline in Britain's economic power, and a renewed look at the strategic importance of the Middle East, America's interest in Persian Gulf oil increased dramatically.⁴³ The United States government resolved to take a leading role in the development of the Middle East oil industry.

In the direct aftermath of World War II, the U.S. concluded it was vital to national security to safeguard access to the oil reserves in the Middle East and prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the region. As part of the plan to secure these goals, the U.S. reinvigorated the Arabian-America Oil Company (ARAMCO) with an innovative financial agreement, dispatched U.S. Marines to occupy Beirut for three months to suppress an uprising in 1958, and backed American friendly regimes in Jordan, Syria, and the Persian Gulf.⁴⁴ Perhaps one of the most striking American actions involved the authorizing of a 1953 joint clandestine operation, conducted by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Secret Intelligence Service, to overthrow the government of Mohammad Mosaddeq, Prime Minister of Iran.⁴⁵ Dwight D.

⁴¹ Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1992), 16.

⁴² Palmer, *Guardians Gulf*, 20.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁴ Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 10, 43, 46.

⁴⁵ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 161.

Eisenhower's administration feared Mosaddeq's growing alliance with the communist Tudeh Party and his increasing overtures to the Soviet Union for aid was an attempt to open the door for a Soviet takeover of the Iranian pro-Western shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.⁴⁶ These American interests and actions in maintaining access to oil and preventing the Soviets from expanding into the area ensnared the Kurdish nationalist movement.

An early example of how the Soviets demonstrated their expansionist goals, and in the process enmeshed the Kurds, occurred in a region encompassed by Iranian Kurdistan. Allied forces had agreed to leave northern Iran within six months of the end of World War II. March 2, 1946, was the departure deadline established by the agreement.⁴⁷ The Americans pulled out ahead of time and the British withdrew on schedule, but the Soviets capitalized on the opportunity and remained in the area. Robert Rossow, Jr., American Vice-Consul in charge of the U.S. Consulate in Tabriz (1945-1946), and Chief of the Political Section of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran (1946-1947), remarked, "One may fairly say that the Cold War began on March 4, 1946."⁴⁸ Instead of departing on the prescribed date, the Soviets sent more troops into the region two days later. Iranian Kurdistan's significance pertained to its proximity to the Soviet border, the potential of oil fields within its territory, and the political disruption caused by Soviet encroachment into Iran, a sovereign nation.⁴⁹ Moscow's actions, coupled with a simultaneous and similar move on Turkey's border, substantiated George Kennan's, the

⁴⁶ Kinzer, *All Shah's Men*, 4.

⁴⁷ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 5-6.

⁴⁸ Robert Rosso, Jr., "The Battle of Azerbaijan, 1946, *The Middle East Journal* 10, no.1 (Winter 1956), <http://www.jstor.org.exproxy.libraries.wright.edu/stable/4322770> (accessed February 19, 2018): 17.

⁴⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 52.

American Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, warning of Soviet hostility towards the West in his famous "Long Telegram." During Soviet presence in the region, particularly from December 1945 until Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin ordered his troops to leave in May 1946, the Soviets encouraged and protected a secessionist movement in Azerbaijan and in Eastern Kurdistan.⁵⁰ A group of Kurdish nationalists, under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad of Mahabad, took advantage of the political dynamics and reinvigorated the early twentieth-century campaign for independence and statehood, much to the consternation of the U.S., British, and Iranian governments because of direct Soviet involvement.⁵¹ With the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the Kurdish nationalist movement was effectively suppressed by the Iranian government on December 15, 1946.⁵² From the perspective of the United States, the expansionist behavior exhibited by the Soviets in Iran justified a response in the newly developing Cold War strategy of containment. The events described provide an early example of how the Iraqi Kurds entered into Cold War rivalries.

REPUBLIC OF MAHABAD

The short lived Republic of Mahabad (1946) in Iranian Kurdistan, demonstrated that a segment of the Kurdish population continued to harbor nationalist ambitions. Instigated and supported by the Soviets, a group of leading Kurdish chiefs established a self-governing region and set down a series of six objectives. The primary aim called for autonomy for Iranian Kurds within the state of Iran.⁵³ The formation of the republic started the coalescing of divergent Kurdish groups and set course for a more unified

⁵⁰ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 241.

⁵¹ Ibid., 240.

⁵² Ibid., 244.

⁵³ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 241.

nationalist movement. Although the Republic of Mahabad lasted for less than a year, the Iraqi Kurds, under the leadership of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, emerged as a major force in the campaign for self-rule.

THE COLD WAR AND REGIME CHANGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Cold War marshaled in a new era of conflict that effected innumerable amounts of changes and upheavals throughout the world. Older traditional systems of governance collided with new ideologies causing governments worldwide to inwardly reflect on how best to rebuild in the postwar environment. Leery of the Soviets during wartime, the tensions between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics grew in intensity as the Soviet government pressed for legitimacy in the international community. The Soviet system advocated an ideology of Marxism-Leninism that centered on state control of property and economic activity, and challenged America's democratic institution which championed individual liberty and capitalism. As demonstrated earlier in Iran, the Middle East became entangled in the ideological battle between the two superpowers. The U.S. strategy of containment encompassed shoring up regional governments that favored and supported American policy, particularly those countries rich in oil reserves and that bordered the Soviet Union.

In addition to the global implications of the Cold War in the Middle East, the creation of Israel in 1948 produced tremendous regional tensions and conflicts between Arabs and Israelis. One of the outcomes of the formation of an independent Zionist state resulted in a heightened awareness and the popularity of Arab nationalism, which gained strength and pushed back against Western imperialism. Egypt's Gamal Abd al-Nasser proposed positive neutrality in the Cold War ideological battle in the Middle East, and

actively pursued his nonalignment agenda. The region was fraught with discord. Some independent states aligned with the West in the Cold War, while others adopted Nasser's stance of nonalignment, which afforded negotiations with the Soviet Union without having to subscribe to their ideology. As well, a number of Middle Eastern countries contested the regional powers of rivals. Many states suffered from internal dissensions as various political factions vied for power within state governments, such as the civil war in Lebanon, the coup in Iraq, and the struggles associated with the changing monarchy in Jordan. All of this created global and regional levels of upheaval that drew in the Kurds.

Nearly landlocked, Iraq shares a common border with Iran. Since the sixteenth century, the two countries have engaged in bitter territorial disputes over the Shatt al-'Arab, which is Iraq's only open water access. During the Mandate of Iraq, the *thalweg* principle, a boundary established using the lowest part of the riverbed, determined the border between the two countries, thus giving Iraq majority control over the waterway. In 1937, after Iraq gained independence, Iran and Iraq signed the Iran-Iraq Frontier Treaty acknowledging the official waterway divide between the two countries, although some factions within the Iraqi government protested the agreement over losing some control to Iran.⁵⁴ The signed treaty also paved the way for an alliance, the Saadabad Pact (1937), between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan, to counter Soviet encroachment. Until the 1958 Iraqi military coup that toppled the monarchy, Iraq and Iran coexisted in relative peace. The two countries, joined by Turkey, Pakistan, and Britain, formed the Baghdad Pact (1955), an anti-Soviet defense partnership.⁵⁵ At the time, both Iraq and Iran were steadfastly anti-communist and pro-Western. But the Iraqi coup brought to

⁵⁴ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 90.

⁵⁵ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2012), 74.

power 'Abd al-Karim Qasim who established a new decisively anti-Western regime.⁵⁶ In 1959, Iraq broke with the Baghdad Pact. The new Iraqi regime increasingly turned to the Soviet Union for foreign aid and military supplies.⁵⁷ Relations between Iraq and Iran deteriorated rapidly in the evolving political atmosphere. The Iranian government of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi became progressively concerned that Qasim's regime would escalate the again contested Shatt al-'Arab agreement, which could lead to all out warfare between the two nations, and ultimately threaten the sovereignty of Iran.⁵⁸

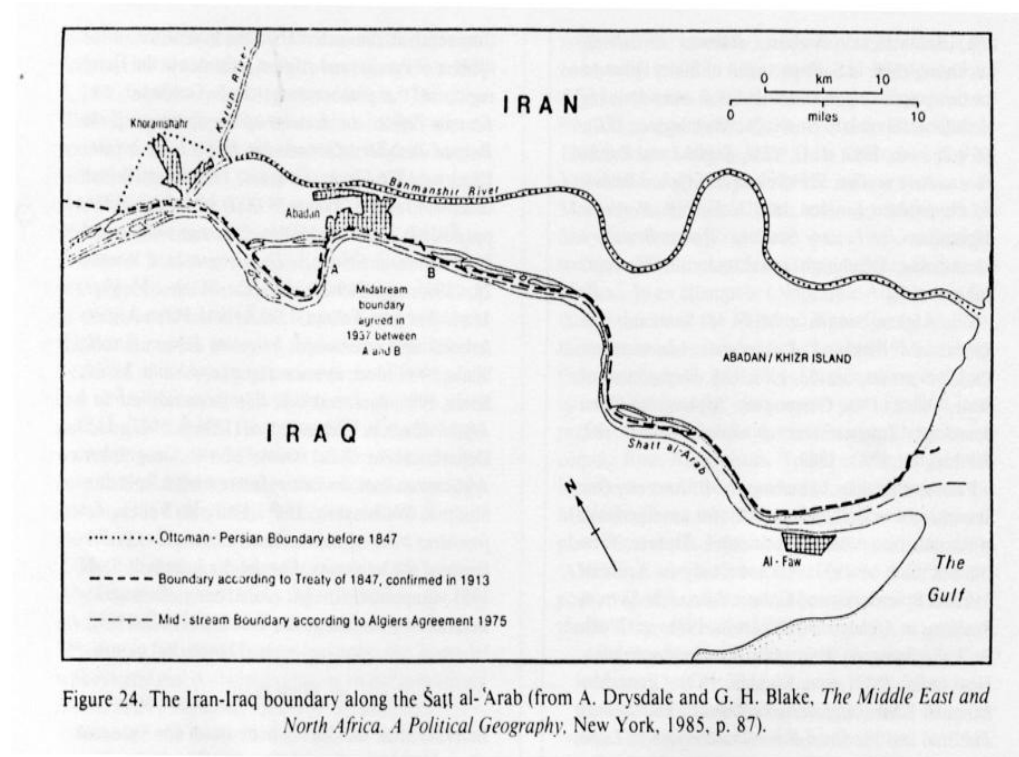


Figure 3. *Shatt al-‘Arab*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Iran-Iraq_Shatt_al-Arab_Boundries.jpg

When Qasim came to power, he offered amnesty to Mullah Mustafa Barzani, Kurdish leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) founded in 1946, who had been

⁵⁶ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 148.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

in exile in the Soviet Union since 1946.⁵⁹ For Qasim, the 1958 move to bring Barzani back was a means to help shore up his base within the Iraqi government. In Qasim's amnesty offer, he promised the Kurds a certain level of autonomy, but failed to carry through with his pledge. As such, a deep chasm developed between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, and open warfare eventually broke out in the early fall of 1961, mainly in the northern tribal regions of Iraqi Kurdistan.⁶⁰ For Iran's part, the Shah seized the opportunity and initiated overtures of support to Barzani, by means of goods and arms, in support of the Kurds' rebellion against the Iraqi regime.⁶¹ The Shah hoped to weaken Iraq's military abilities and to keep the Iraqi government preoccupied in Kurdistan. The once congenial relationship between Iran and Iraq disintegrated into firm adversaries. Within this Cold War and provincial milieu, the Kurdish nationalist movement disrupted and became embroiled in internal politics in both Iran and Iraq.

The Iraqi break from the Baghdad Pact, and subsequent turn to the Soviets for economic and military support, caused great consternation within the United States government. Qasim's attempt to strengthen his military regime with a number of internal policies changes, such as land reform, revisions of the personal status law, and education reform, instead instigated more religious and ethnic rebellions.⁶² Internationally, Qasim asserted claim to the newly independent state of Kuwait in June 1961, which he proclaimed historically belonged to Iraq. He then passed Public Law 80, in December 1961, which effectively took 99.5 percent control of Iraq Petroleum Company's (IPC)

⁵⁹ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 9.

⁶⁰ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 163.

⁶¹ Ibid., 165.

⁶² Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 98-100.

concession territory without compensation.⁶³ Qasim's actions placed his regime in a precarious situation both internally and internationally. The Kurdish uprising in the north diminished his ability to act militarily on his claim to Kuwait. Internationally, the Kuwait assertion and the removal of foreign control of oil placed Qasim's government at odds with Britain, the United States, and other Arab countries.

Qasim's government was toppled in February 1963 by the Ba'athists.⁶⁴ The Ba'ath, meaning rebirth or resurrection, was a pan-Arab political party founded in Syria (1946) that burgeoned in Iraq in the 1950s.⁶⁵ When the Ba'athists came into power, the U.S. administration of Lyndon B. Johnson maintained a watchful eye on Iraq's situation and continued the U.S. policy of nonintervention, along with a passive support for Arab unification, in which the new Iraqi regime was aligned.⁶⁶ The Six Day War (June 5-10, 1967), however, changed the dynamics between the United States and Iraq. The Iraqi regime, having sent a token force in the battle between Israel and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, severed all diplomatic relations with the United States and Britain because of their complicit alignment with Israel during the war.⁶⁷

During Richard M. Nixon's bid for the U.S. presidency, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, led by Hasan al-Bakr, seized control of the Iraqi government.⁶⁸ On July 30, 1968, just two weeks after grabbing power, al-Bakr expelled all non-Ba'athist allies from political office.⁶⁹ For the next thirty-five years, the Ba'athists remained in control of the

⁶³ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁵ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 430.

⁶⁶ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 49-50.

⁶⁷ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 104.

⁶⁸ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 191.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 192.

Iraqi government. The move also marked Saddam Hussein's, al-Bakr's kinsman, rise to power.

While Iraq experienced numerous regime changes, Iranian-Iraqi affairs remained adversarial, and U.S.-Iraqi diplomacy deteriorated, the United States and Iran experienced a strengthening of ties. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the U.S. and Iran enjoyed a cordial relationship.⁷⁰ After the forced abdication of his father during World War II, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was installed on the throne and aligned his government with the Allies. Subsequent to the Soviet incursion into Iran, along with other antagonistic moves by the Soviets in Greece and Turkey (1946), President Harry S. Truman announced, during his 1949 inaugural address, his Point Four Program. As part of his containment policy of Soviet communism, Truman supplied U.S. technical and economic assistance to developing countries.⁷¹ The Shah of Iran regarded the amount of economic aid he received insubstantial, especially compared to his counterparts in Greece and Turkey. As such, the Shah relied on Iran's share of oil profits, which the Iranian Prime Minister Haj Ali Razmara attempted to renegotiate with the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in July 1949, to fend off another Soviet incursion and communist subversion.⁷² The fact that Britain continued to be in control of the AIOC, and the general feeling that the prime minister acquiesced to British interests, contributed to the rise of nationalism in Iran. The assassination of Razmara by a radical Islamist

⁷⁰ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 4.

⁷¹ Roham, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (2014), <http://rave.ohiolink.edu/ebooks/ebc/9780199375691> (accessed November 24, 2015), 13.

⁷² Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 14.

group on March 7, 1951, provided the impetus for the Majlis (Iranian parliament) to nationalize the AIOC and elect Mohammad Mosaddeq as Prime Minister.⁷³

As previously discussed, the U.S. became alarmed by Mosaddeq's increasing alliance with the Tudeh Party and overtures to the Soviet Union. Consequently, the 1953 sanctioned coup that ousted Mosaddeq from office enabled the Shah to gain tighter controls over the Iranian government. It also greatly increased U.S. involvement in Iran. Under the Eisenhower administration, economic aid to Iran increased 665% and military assistance amplified by 341%.⁷⁴ In August of 1954, the new National Iranian Oil Company signed an agreement with an international consortium of oil producers, which split oil profits fifty-fifty between the consortium and Iran.⁷⁵ The move ended the British monopoly on Iranian oil, and gave the Shah additional means to stabilize Iran's economy and consolidate his power. In 1955, the Shah signed the Baghdad Pact, which firmly aligned Iran with the West. When Iraq broke with the pact, the Shah used Iraq's realignment toward the Soviets to press for even more U.S. security guarantees. At this juncture in Iranian-Iraqi relations, the Shah made his first approach to Barzani with a proposal of monetary and arms support in the Kurds' fight against the Qasim regime. By doing so, the Shah hoped to diminish Qasim's ability to act on his renewed claims to the Shatt al-Arab and on Iran's oil-rich province of Khuzestan.⁷⁶ Throughout the decade, the Shah's growing unpopularity caused grave concerns within the Eisenhower administration for the regime's stability. Nonetheless, the U.S. continued the flow of aid to Iran to maintain the West's influence over the Shah. The succeeding administrations

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 70.

of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson sustained the supply of weaponry and economic assistance, all the while encouraging the Shah towards reform and moderation efforts.⁷⁷

BRITAIN'S DEPARTURE

In 1968, Britain announced it would militarily withdraw from the Gulf region by 1971. Since the nineteenth century, Britain had been the dominate force in the region. But the Six Day War, and the ensuing Arab oil boycott coupled with the closing of the Suez Canal, took an enormous economic toll on Britain.⁷⁸ It could no longer see a feasible way to sustain what was left of the empire in the Middle East. The British Cabinet had debated the move for over a year before making the formal announcement. The declaration caught the United States off guard.⁷⁹ Johnson and his advisors had scant time to formulate a new Middle Eastern policy given that the U.S. had heavily relied on Britain's authority in the region and maintained a position of nonintervention in the region. In formulating a plan to fill the impending void, and amid growing American domestic pressure against direct military intervention in Asia and the Middle East, the Johnson administration favored a proposal discussed in Britain of installing regional powers to fill their role.⁸⁰ Both Iran and Iraq individually hoped to take on the function of regional power.⁸¹ After careful consideration of the regional dynamics, and possible repercussions, the new administration of Richard M. Nixon engaged the Shah of Iran in providing security in the Gulf as part of his Nixon Doctrine (1969), whereby the U.S.

⁷⁷ Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 87.

⁷⁸ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 108.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸⁰ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 31.

⁸¹ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 104.

delivered military and economic aid to U.S. allied countries threatened by a nuclear power.⁸² It is within these regional and global dynamics and conflicts that determined the fate of the Iraqi Kurdish national movement from 1969 to 1988.

⁸² Palmer, *Guardians Gulf*, 87.

III. NIXON'S WHITE HOUSE AND THE SHAH OF IRAN

When Richard M. Nixon took office in 1969, one of his initial tasks involved reshaping America's foreign policy. Long weary of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, and deeply involved in the civil rights movement on the home front, the American public paid little attention to the events unfolding in the Middle East. Yet the region remained crucial to U.S. security in maintaining the flow of oil to the West and in countering Soviet expansionism. The Twin Pillars Policy, initiated by the Johnson administration in anticipation of Britain's withdrawal from the region, devolved U.S. security in the Persian Gulf to Saudi Arabia and Iran in an attempt to contain the spread of communism.⁸³ Recognizing American sentiment on U.S. overinvolvement on the world stage, Nixon discussed his rapidly evolving foreign policy approach with reporters on July 25, 1969, in Guam. Initially labeled the Guam Doctrine, but later called the Nixon Doctrine, his remarks signified the role the U.S. would play in the post-Vietnam future. Nixon stated, among other key points, the U.S. would honor all its treaty commitments, and "that as far as the problems of military defense, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, that the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be handled by, and responsibility for it taken by, the

⁸³ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 29.

Asian nations themselves.”⁸⁴ Although Nixon’s remarks concerned Asia, they quickly formed the basis of his overall foreign policy, which extended to the Persian Gulf.

Under the Twin Pillars Policy, both Saudi Arabia and Iran stood as the regional guardians of U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf. Nixon, preoccupied with Vietnam and U.S.-Soviet relations, nevertheless aspired to counter Soviet advances in the Middle East with improved relations with Arab states. Neither Nixon, nor his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, possessed much understanding of the Middle East, especially in the diplomatic methods employed in the region.⁸⁵ The United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, unanimously approved on November 22, 1967, which affirmed the fulfilment of Charter principles requiring the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East,⁸⁶ held little importance to either Nixon or Kissinger. In his memoir, *White House Years*, Kissinger asserted, “When I entered office I knew little of the Middle East.”⁸⁷ He went on to claim that Nixon felt Middle East diplomacy had no appeal domestically and possessed limited potential for any type of success.⁸⁸ Although Nixon planned to guide foreign policy from the White House, and wanted a U.S. presence in the region mainly to thwart further Soviet influence, he desired to distance himself from directing Middle East policy. As such, Nixon delegated the State Department to manage the region.⁸⁹ With continuous, and increasing, tensions engulfing the Middle East,

⁸⁴ Richard Nixon, *XXXVII President of the United States: 1969-1974*, 279-*Informal Remarks in Guam with Newsmen*, July 25, 1969, under “UNITED STATES ROLE IN ASIA [2.]

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2140&st=&st1=> (accessed March 8, 2018).

⁸⁵ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 341.

⁸⁶ *United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, S/RES/242 (1967)* <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136> (accessed March 30, 2018).

⁸⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 341.

⁸⁸ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 196.

⁸⁹ Kissinger, *Years Upheaval*, 196.

Kissinger took on a much larger role and supplanted the State Department in handling Middle Eastern affairs.

Nixon and Kissinger resonated intellectually. In choosing Kissinger, Nixon later expressed in his memoir, “we were very much alike in our general outlook in that we shared a belief in the importance of isolating and influencing the factors affecting worldwide balances of power.”⁹⁰ Since Nixon wanted a direct hand in guiding foreign policy, his choice of National Security Advisor was crucial. As chair, Kissinger revamped the National Security Council (NSC), which then yielded him considerable power and effectively allowed him to skirt both the State Department and Congress in foreign policy matters.⁹¹ Even though the Middle East continued under the purview of the State Department, Kissinger crafted secret channels, “back channels” as he called them, to foreign governments and U.S. ambassadors.⁹² The furtive conduits, approved by Nixon, characterized the general manner in which Kissinger carried out much of his foreign policy processes and decision making.

Appreciative of Israel’s position and role of countering communism in the Middle East, Nixon initially endeavored to employ a more evenhanded approach to the region with improved U.S.-Arab relations to balance the pro-Israel strategy of his predecessors.⁹³ Although Nixon aimed to improve relations with Arab states, he skirted direct involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁹⁴ As for Saudi Arabia, the government

⁹⁰ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 340.

⁹¹ Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

⁹² Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 46.

⁹³ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America’s Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110.

⁹⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 200.

looked with caution to their new role as part of the twin pillars, as they seldom made public stands on issues pertaining to matters outside of its borders.⁹⁵ On the other side of the Gulf, the Shah of Iran relished his U.S. appointed position of importance. Long wary of British imperialism in the region, Mohammad Reza feared that Britain's pull out from the region would favor an Arab state, such as Iraq, as their replacement, and place Iran at greater risk to Soviet encroachment. The Shah also desired to reestablish Iran among the great world powers, a position he felt the country once occupied.⁹⁶ America's move to position Iran as the other column supporting U.S. regional matters offered reassurance to Mohammad Reza, and provided the opportunity for him to champion his overarching agenda. While enjoying diplomatic relations, Saudi Arabia, a Sunni Arab state, and Iran, a Shi'a non-Arab country, held differing worldviews, particularly in modernization, which made for uneasy cooperation as twin pillars of America's new Middle Eastern policy.⁹⁷ With progressively intense lobbying by the Shah, the Nixon administration increasingly relied on Iran to deliver regional stability, along with an orderly, continuous stream of oil to the United States and its allies. This reliance on Iran to provide security in the Persian Gulf on behalf of the U.S. emboldened the Shah to assert his claim of regional dominance, initiate a challenge to Iraq over the Shatt al-'Arab, and instigate a proxy war using the Iraqi Kurds as strategic allies.

THE SHAH OF IRAN

The warm association between Richard Nixon and the Shah of Iran began in 1953. While serving as vice president under Eisenhower, the two met for the first time.

⁹⁵ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 110.

⁹⁶ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 40.

⁹⁷ Palmer, *Guardians Gulf*, 88.

During the encounter, Nixon observed him to be quiet and thoughtful, and later remarked, “I sensed an inner strength in him, and I felt that in the years ahead he would become a strong leader.”⁹⁸ As president, Nixon found a matured Mohammad Reza with more self-assurance and political astuteness, and a kindred spirit. They both held adamant anti-communist views, professed to be practitioners of *realpolitik*, and scorned American liberal intellectuals.⁹⁹ The rapport the two shared allowed for greater ease in implementing Nixon’s doctrine in the Gulf region. Apportioning regional responsibility to the Shah in curbing communism, the U.S. provided assistance and training to the Iranian government while interfering little with how they solved their internal communist problem.¹⁰⁰ Mohammad Reza seized the opportunity afforded by the White House and amplified his lobbying for additional oil sales to the U.S. in exchange for increased purchasing of American weapons to defend the Gulf from Soviet incursion.¹⁰¹ Iran appeared poised to transform into a regional superpower.

REGIME CHANGE IN IRAQ AND THE IRAQI KURDS

In 1968, Iran’s adversary to the west, Iraq, endured yet another regime change that brought the Ba‘thists to power. The previous Iraqi regime of ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Arif severed ties with the U.S. in 1967 after the Six Day War, although back channels existed between the United States and Iraq through foreign intermediaries.¹⁰² Shortly after Nixon took office, Iraq’s new regime, under the Ba‘thists leader Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, sentenced and hanged sixteen people accused of spying for Israeli.¹⁰³ The Iraqi move

⁹⁸ Nixon, *RN*, 133.

⁹⁹ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 197.

¹⁰¹ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 47.

¹⁰² Gibson, *Sold Out?* 105.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 119.

aroused worldwide attention, including an attempted intervention by the U.S. through oversea emissaries, and a U.S. initiated appeal from the United Nations, but al-Bakr insisted the matter involved a domestic issue and that foreign entities needed to stay out of Iraq's internal affairs.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, in June 1969, the Iraqi regime signed an agreement with the Soviet Union to develop the Rumaila oilfield, a move that significantly brought the Soviets into the production of Gulf petroleum, and invited closer ties between Iraq and the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁵ Increasingly isolated internationally, and tenuously governing domestically amid their ongoing consolidation of power, the Ba'athists, nonetheless, maintained a belligerent anti-Western stance and continued the call for armed struggle against Israel's occupation of Arab territory.¹⁰⁶ Iraq's actions garnered little attention from the White House, which contented itself with the State Department and Iran dealing with the Iraqi issue.

Al-Bakr's regime experienced rising trepidation with the growing alliance between Iran and the U.S., and markedly so when American arm imports increased to Iran after the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine. Although its neighbor to the east caused major concern, the Kurdish question within Iraq presented just as large a problem. The Iraqi Kurds' quest for autonomy posed a major obstacle to the Ba'ath's consolidation of power, particularly in light of Barzani and his *Peshmerga* (Kurdish fighting force, meaning "one who faces death")¹⁰⁷ proving over the years they could be a major source of disruption to the various ruling governments in Iraq. After Barzani's forces attacked

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 146.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 144.

¹⁰⁷ The Kurdish Project, "Kurdish Peshmerga," <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-nationalism/kurdish-peshmerga/> (accessed September 29, 2017).

the oilfields in Kirkuk in March 1969, and disrupted oil flow for a number of days, al-Bakr's government looked to defuse Kurdish aims and bring the KDP into the Iraqi body politic.¹⁰⁸ Long aware of both Iranian and Israeli support to the KDP, and hoping to counteract the two countries' influences, al-Bakr dispatched Saddam Hussein, then second in command, to broker a deal with Barzani to appease the Kurds.¹⁰⁹ Before Saddam could negotiate a settlement with Barzani, the Shah of Iran publically abrogated the 1937 treaty over the Shatt al-ʿArab in April 1969.

The Shatt al-ʿArab (River of the Arabs, in Arabic) is formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris in southern Iraq and empties into the Persian Gulf. Its southern end delineates the boundary between Iran and Iraq. Historically, the use of the river as a demarcation line presented a number of difficulties mainly due to the use of the *thalweg* principle previously mentioned. The signed 1937 treaty recognized the border between the two countries using both the low water mark on the eastern side of the river and the *thalweg* between Abadan and Khorramshahr, approximately a four mile stretch of the Shatt al-ʿArab.¹¹⁰ This delineation proved advantageous to Iraq as the treaty gave control of most of the river to the Iraqis. After arguing successfully of its nearly landlocked geography, and heavily supported by the British as a former mandate, the treaty granted Iraq concessions that allowed for the eventuality of Iran paying tolls to Iraq when Iranian ships used the Shatt al-ʿArab.¹¹¹ In addition, stipulations of lowering the

¹⁰⁸ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 326.

¹⁰⁹ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 138.

¹¹⁰ Richard Schofield, "Position, Function, and Symbol: The Shatt al-ʿArab Dispute in Perspective," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War [Electronic Resource]*, eds. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.libraries.wright.edu/book/10.1057%2F9781403980427> (accessed March 13, 2019), 45.

¹¹¹ Schofield, "Position, Function, Symbol," 46.

Iranian flag and requiring an Iraqi pilot on Iranian ships contributed to the escalating tensions between the two countries after the 1937 treaty signing.¹¹²

Since 1963, four years after Barzani initially reached out to Israel for assistance against their common foe, Iraq, the Israeli government provided weapons and ammunition to the KDP in support of their quest for an independent Iraqi Kurdistan.¹¹³ Israel's motive for helping the Kurds centered on unbalancing the then Iraqi regime, and not particularly on backing Iraqi Kurdish autonomy. The Israeli government feared growing Iraqi Arab nationalism, and with Iran's secret assistance, agreed to send Soviet-made weapons, medical supplies, and communication equipment to the Iraqi Kurds' nationalist movement, along with a \$50,000 monthly stipend, which Iran supplemented with additional monetary and material support.¹¹⁴ Both governments agreed to keep the knowledge of the covert arrangements from their allies. While the Israeli-Iranian backing allowed Barzani and the KDP to make several significant military strikes and raids against the Iraqi central governments, the Kurds were unable to turn the joint support into creditable advancements toward autonomy. The Iraqi Kurds were able, however, to diffuse Iraq's strength in the region by preoccupying and subverting the Ba'athist regime's internal efforts to consolidate their base of power.

Viewing the Iraqi Ba'athists' socialist rhetoric and growing relationship with the Soviets as disturbing, and a potential threat to his sovereignty, the Shah felt emboldened by the Twin Pillars Policy to assert his regional dominance against al-Bakr's regime. With the looming 1971 British withdrawal from the region, the Shah endeavored to prove

¹¹² Ibid., 53.

¹¹³ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 72.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

his significance in the Gulf to the U.S. by manufacturing a crisis along the Shatt al-‘Arab waterway, thereby demonstrating his assumed provincial authority and ability to check Iraq’s army. The Shah announced Iran would make full use of the Shatt al-‘Arab without respect to Iraqi territorial rights, established under the 1937 Saadabad Pact, and amassed troops along various disputed southern border points.¹¹⁵ He hoped to diminish the Ba‘thist regime’s effectiveness by splitting Iraqi forces between fighting the Kurds in the north and defending Iraqi territorial rights on the Shatt al-‘Arab.¹¹⁶ Iraq retaliated against the move by threatening to use force to defend its claim of the waterway. For its part, the U.S. State Department continued its hands-off policy towards Iraq and dismissed Iranian claims of al-Bakr’s regime becoming a communist satellite of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ The evidence gathered by the State Department indicated that the Ba‘th regime, contrary to Iranian assertions, continued in its internal struggle with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), and in fact, worked to severely limit, if not eliminate, ICP involvement in Iraq’s central government.¹¹⁸ As such, the White House deferred to the State Department’s position and allowed the status quo to stand.

With fighting Barzani’s Peshmerga in the north, and Iran contesting the Shatt al-‘Arab, al-Bakr and his second in command needed time to secure their base of power. In order to placate the Kurds and stop the open hostilities, along with countering the Shah’s support of the KDP, Saddam traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan to work out a deal with Barzani. On March 11, 1970, both camps signed and initiated an agreement that recognized,

¹¹⁵ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001), 122.

¹¹⁶ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 120.

¹¹⁷ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 196.

among other items, the Iraqi Kurds' right to territorial autonomy.¹¹⁹ As noted by Ofra Bengio and David McDowall, the declaration marked, for the first time in the twentieth century, an Iraqi regime recognizing Kurdish rights to territorial autonomy.¹²⁰ McDowall also stated that the accord has endured as "the Kurds' favoured foundation stone for future relations with the rest of Iraq."¹²¹ For the Ba'ath regime, the agreement provided both time for centralizing their control and relief from the armed struggle with the KDP. In addition to signing the declaration, Barzani broke his ties with Iran.¹²² These combined actions shifted the regional dynamics between Iraq and Iran as the agreement allowed for the reallocating of Iraqi troops from the provinces in the north to the contested regions along the Shatt al-'Arab.

THE 1970 MARCH ACCORD

The March accord angered the Shah of Iran, who had previously sent word to Baghdad that he would cease supplying the KDP in return for Iraqi concessions in the Shatt al-'Arab, which al-Bakr declined.¹²³ Significantly, the mutual agreement between the Ba'athist regime and the KDP meant the Shah lost a critical advantage, the Iraqi Kurds' belligerence against Baghdad, in his scheme to assert Iran's regional authority. The Shah then intensified his appeal to the U.S. for greater support, particularly in helping "to equip and develop its forces so that minimum necessary deterrent strength could be developed prior to British pull-out from Gulf end of 1971."¹²⁴ He was

¹¹⁹ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 49.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 327.

¹²² Tripp, *History Iraq*, 200.

¹²³ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 121.

¹²⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), Document 53, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d53> (accessed April 7, 2018).

convinced the Soviets initiated the declaration with the ultimate goal of establishing an independent Kurdish state, thereby creating a conduit bypassing Iran and Turkey and permitting easier Soviet access to the Middle East.¹²⁵ Over the following two months, the Shah sent numerous communications to the State Department via direct talks with various U.S. embassy and military officials, as well as messages sent by him through his prime minister, making multiple requests for increased resources to defend the Persian Gulf from Soviet encroachment.¹²⁶ At this juncture, the State Department continued the lead in handling Middle Eastern affairs. Skeptical of the Shah's warnings, the State Department declined to take any explicit action, and expressed to Tehran that the declaration between the Ba'athist regime and the Iraqi Kurds would likely fall apart as the two camps held a mutual distrust of the other.¹²⁷ Although Kissinger received briefings and reports on the region, and generated memorandums to keep the president briefed on situations, Persian Gulf issues remained a low priority.

Throughout the remainder of 1970, and during 1971, the relationship between the Ba'athists and the Iraqi Kurds stayed cautious. In July 1970, the Ba'ath rejected the KDP's nomination of Habib Karim as Vice President of the Republic because he was of Persian ancestry.¹²⁸ Article twelve of the March accord stipulated that one of the vice presidents would be a Kurd.¹²⁹ The refusal of Karim elicited no negative response from Barzani, but the move indicated that each side continued to be wary of the other. Another article

¹²⁵ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 75.

¹²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), Chapter 2, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/ch2> (accessed April 7, 2018).

¹²⁷ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 118.

¹²⁸ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq 1958*, 143.

¹²⁹ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 328.

in the agreement called for the “unification of areas with a Kurdish majority as a self-governing unit.”¹³⁰ In order to determine the demarcation of the autonomous region, Baghdad called for a census to take place in October 1970.¹³¹ The region of Kirkuk, an oil-rich province, presented a sticking point for both sides. Baghdad feared the census would prove the area’s population majority Kurdish, thus requiring Kirkuk be turned over to the Iraqi Kurds.¹³² Barzani worried the census would be manipulated by the regime, either by forging results or by relocating the inhabitants to change the population statistics.¹³³ Each side, leery of the other’s motives, maneuvered to present their case. Barzani attempted to bring in under his control the Turkomans in Kirkuk, whom the Turkoman leader claimed were threatened with elimination if they did not comply with Kurdish demands, thereby asserting the Turkoman as Kurdish.¹³⁴ Another argument attempted by Barzani entailed including the Faili Kurds, originally from Luristan, Iran, as citizens, and therefore counting them in the census as Kurdish.¹³⁵ The Ba‘th regime, for their part, reinstituted and propagated an Arabization policy in the Kirkuk region whereby they evacuated Kurds and settled Arabs.¹³⁶ Coupled with a failed assassination attempt of Barzani’s son, Idris, as well as Barzani himself, the March declaration showed definitive signs of unraveling.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 54.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹³⁵ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 152.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

BREAKING OF RELATIONS

Iranian-Iraqi relations devolved, on November 30, 1971, Iran seized three islands in the Strait of Hormuz.¹³⁷ One day later, Iraq severed diplomatic relations with Iran, as well as broke off ties to Great Britain. After unsuccessfully attempting to rally other Arab nations against Iran's growing power in the Gulf, and Britain's quiet consent of Iran's increasing military build-up, Iraq turned towards rapprochement with the Soviets.¹³⁸ The signing of the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, in April 1972, coupled with the nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company two months later, enabled al-Bakr and Saddam to gain considerable control of the central government.¹³⁹ Whereas the 1970 March accord sought to align the Kurds with the Ba'th regime, the new treaty forsook the Iraqi Kurds in favor of the ICP, which stood as an obstacles to the Ba'th's consolidation of power, too. While Barzani had previously asked the Soviets to be included in the Soviet-Iraqi pact, the signed agreement left the Kurds out altogether with only a promise by the Soviet premier that he would take up the matter with Baghdad.¹⁴⁰ Moscow neglected to make good on their word.

The earlier assassination attempts on Barzani and his son led the KDP leader to renew his association with both Iran and Israel. As the Soviets had pressured him to acquiesce to Baghdad, Barzani felt increasingly constrained in his ability to counteract the Ba'th and to assert for Iraqi Kurdish autonomy. One of the stipulations of the Soviet-Iraqi treaty involved including the Iraqi Kurds and Iraqi communists into the National

¹³⁷ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 66.

¹³⁸ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 131.

¹³⁹ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 208.

¹⁴⁰ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 67.

Patriotic Front with the Ba‘th in hopes of stabilizing Iraq internally.¹⁴¹ Now heavily invested in Iraq, the Soviet Union wanted a calm domestic scene to insure the usefulness and longevity of their alliance. The Soviets courted Barzani with guarantees of support for autonomy if the Iraqi Kurds aligned with the Ba‘thist regime. Distrusting of the Soviets, Barzani then sent urgent messages to Washington. The warning to the administration was intervene with support or the Kurds would be forced to join with the Iraqi regime. Barzani made several appeals through various indirect channels, such as via SAVAK (Iran’s Organization of National Security and Information) officials, a KDP emissary to U.S. Embassy representatives, and a direct request from King Hussein of Jordan, but his appeals for direct U.S. financial assistance went unheeded.¹⁴²

Washington’s preoccupation with final preparations for the upcoming Moscow Summit, along with recommendations from the NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs) and the CIA, precluded any changes.¹⁴³ The Nixon administration maintained its nonintervention policy towards the Iraqi Kurds as the U.S. had no strategic interest in their nationalist movement. Although the Soviet-Iraqi treaty caused concern in the White House, Nixon remained focused on achieving détente with the Soviet Union and preferred to make no policy changes that could be construed as anti-Soviet.¹⁴⁴ Nixon chose, instead, to let Iran and Israel handle the Kurds.

As the Moscow Summit engrossed the White House, Barzani and SAVAK devised a plan to overthrow the Ba‘th regime using an alliance of Iraqi opposition forces

¹⁴¹ Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 137.

¹⁴² Gibson, *Sold Out?* 133.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 135.

operating out of Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁴⁵ The KDP, while receiving funding from Iran and Israel, remained in negotiations with Baghdad for the full implementation of the 1970 March accord. Barzani felt the unfulfilled articles in the accord, in particular the return of Kurds to their villages and redress of wrongful Arabization, equated to an all-out assault on the Iraqi Kurds.¹⁴⁶ Untrusting of Tehran to fulfill its promises, and clearly at odds with Baghdad, Barzani pinned his hopes on Washington eventually coming through with support for Kurdish ambitions.

After the success of the Moscow Summit, and no longer feeling the pre-talk constraints, the U.S. turned its attention towards re-evaluating its policy on Iraq. The direct Soviet-Iraqi alliance changed the Cold War dynamics in the Gulf region. As well, it highlighted Barzani's arguments for the U.S. supporting the Iraqi Kurds. Nixon, having previous experience dealing with Iraq in the late 1950s as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice president, understood the Cold War significance of the treaty.¹⁴⁷ The White House did not believe in the validity of the Iraqi Kurd's struggle, and it harbored the fear that the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq would spread to its regional allies, Turkey and Iran.¹⁴⁸ In agreement, the State Department warned that autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds would prove regionally destabilizing and detrimental in the long term.¹⁴⁹ Kissinger often referred to the Iraqi Kurdish uprising as a 'Kurdish thing', but acknowledged in his concluding memoir, *Years of Renewal*, that after signing the treaty with the Soviet Union, "Iraqi forces stepped up their attacks on the Kurds beyond a level

¹⁴⁵ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 80.

¹⁴⁶ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 332.

¹⁴⁷ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 118.

¹⁴⁸ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 70.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

that could be balanced by covert Iranian and Israeli assistance.”¹⁵⁰ Indeed, not only had Iraqi aggression towards the Iraqi Kurds intensified, skirmishes between Iraq and Iran troops escalated along their common border.¹⁵¹ After Nixon and Kissinger’s scheduled trip to Tehran in late May 1972, the tides of fortune changed in favor of Barzani and the KDP.

KISSINGER STEPS IN

While in Iran, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah discussed several key issues relating to current events, from the Moscow Summit to Iran’s help in South Asia. As recorded in the official memorandum of conversation, both leaders reiterated their appreciation of solid U.S.-Iranian relations; Nixon added, “We came to visit Iran because we considered it symbolic of our strong support for our friends. We would not let down our friends.”¹⁵² For his part, the Shah stressed the importance of the Middle East to the West, especially in regards to the flow of oil to the United States and its allies, and the threat posed by the Soviet-Iraqi treaty to Iran’s security.¹⁵³ He also restated his fear that “the Soviets would establish a coalition of the Kurds, the Baathists, and the Communists; the Kurdish problem instead of being a thorn in the side could become an asset to the Communists.”¹⁵⁴ When asked by Kissinger what the U.S. could do, the Shah replied that Turkey needed strengthening, and “Iran can help with the Kurds.”¹⁵⁵ Kissinger later

¹⁵⁰ Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 137; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 581.

¹⁵¹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 581.

¹⁵² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972*, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), Document 200, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d200> (accessed May 16, 2018).

¹⁵³ *FRUS*, 1969-1976, E-4, 200.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

reported, in his third memoir, that after the meeting with the Shah, Nixon felt the Iraqi Kurdish rebellion against the Ba‘thist regime would fall apart without America’s help.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Kissinger remarked that the intent of American sponsorship centered on penalizing Iraq for “imposing their regime,” and the U.S. contributing to the regional balance of power.¹⁵⁷ The support would grant the Kurds increased bargaining power against the Iraqi regime, and bring about some cohesion to the sometimes conflicting reasons for Iranian and Israeli backing.¹⁵⁸ The Tehran meeting prompted America’s first direct support of the Iraqi Kurds and their ambitions for self-governance. In redefining U.S. security in the Persian Gulf, the Nixon administration persisted with the Cold War mindset of containing Soviet influence in the region. Despite the success of the Moscow Summit, unresolved issues over conflicts in the Middle East perpetuated tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. By secretly funding the Iraqi Kurds, and ostensibly their goal of autonomy, the U.S. demonstrated a continued commitment to its Gulf policy of supporting regional states, principally Iran, in defending American interests in the region.

Over the course of Nixon’s first two years in office, Kissinger appropriated a larger role in Middle East policy making. Often circumventing the State Department’s authority and policies in the region, Kissinger utilized his well-developed network of back channels to accomplish his agenda. An August 23, 1973, *New York Times* article, entitled “Rogers Quits, Kissinger Named,” claimed that Kissinger overshadowed William P. Rogers, Secretary of State, despite Rogers apparent role as Nixon’s top adviser on

¹⁵⁶ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 583.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

foreign policy.¹⁵⁹ Kissinger's political prowess ostensibly overshadowed Rogers' abilities. A later *New York Times* article, "William P. Rogers, Who Served as Nixon's Secretary of State, Is Dead at 87," asserted that during Rogers' tenure as Secretary of State, Kissinger secretly arranged the details of Nixon's groundbreaking trip to China (1972), as well as held talks with North Vietnam, all without the knowledge of Rogers.¹⁶⁰ Nixon and Kissinger frequently met several times a day when the National Security Advisor was in Washington.¹⁶¹ Consequently, Kissinger possessed greater access to the President along with more opportunities to argue for the legitimacies of his, Kissinger's, proposals. During the May 1972 meeting with the Shah, Kissinger asserted his perceived position and initiated the inquiry as how best the United States could help. He eventually persuaded Nixon that a move to support the Iraqi Kurds was in the best interest of the United States. Kissinger played the pivotal role in the covert financing of the Kurdish nationalist movement from the onset of U.S. involvement.

U.S. COVERT SUPPORT TO IRAQI KURDS

Against the backdrop of Cold War concerns and the prospect of a secret alliance between the U.S. and the Iraqi Kurds, the Shah of Iran made a request through Richard Helms, Director of the CIA, that a meeting be arranged between Kissinger and two KDP diplomats, Idris Barzani and Mahmoud Uthman.¹⁶² In June 1972, the Kurds presented

¹⁵⁹ Bernard Gwertzman, "Rogers Quits, Kissinger Names," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, August 23, 1973, found within ProQuest Historical Newspaper: New York Times (1851-2009), <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/08/23/archives/rogers-quits-kissingernamed-rogers-resigns-kissinger-named.html> (accessed March 20, 2019).

¹⁶⁰ David Stout, "William P. Rogers, Who Served as Nixon's Secretary of State, Is Dead at 87," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, January 4, 2001, found within ProQuest Historical Newspaper: New York Times (1851-2009), <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/04/us/william-p-rogers-who-served-as-nixon-s-secretary-of-state-is-dead-at-87.html> (accessed March 20, 2019).

¹⁶¹ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 43.

¹⁶² Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 83.

their case directly to key U.S. officials. Although not present, Kissinger authorized Helms and Colonel Richard Kennedy, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Council Planning, to communicate U.S. sympathy for the Iraqi Kurdish movement and acknowledge their presence in Helms' office proved America's consideration of their request.¹⁶³ After the meeting, Helms sent a proposal, dated July 28, to the White House advocating for covert support to the Iraqi Kurds. The CIA's recommendation, prompted by Kissinger, included two means by which military and financial assistance could be ordered, either by circumventing the 40 Committee and go straight by memorandum to the President, or inform the 40 Committee principles, avoiding any paper, and informing them that the President wants this done.¹⁶⁴ A division of the Executive branch, the 40 Committee's mandate specified overseeing proposed significant covert activity. Nixon directed Kissinger to gain approval without meeting on the subject. Citing reasons of security, Kissinger asserted that the plan was hand-carried to the principles with each having the opportunity to object, but none did.¹⁶⁵ Immediately after the consent of the committee principles, shipments of arms and supplies began, funneled through Iran to the Iraqi Kurds. Not until August 1, 1972, did Nixon sign off on the directive, which included \$3 million in financial assistance per year and another \$2 million for military supplies.¹⁶⁶ For the first time, the United States categorically intervened on behalf of the Iraqi Kurds' objectives.

¹⁶³ Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 137.

¹⁶⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), Document 321, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d321> (accessed June 28, 2017).

¹⁶⁵ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 584.

¹⁶⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office,

Throughout the remainder of 1972, and well into 1973, skirmishes intensified between Kurdish and government forces despite on-going negotiations between Barzani and the Iraqi regime. The proposed geographic boundaries of the Kurdish autonomous region constituted the main sticking point.¹⁶⁷ The additional covert support from the U.S. appeared to give the Iraqi Kurds the needed leverage to maintain their ground politically and geographically. With increasing American support, the KDP felt emboldened to resist joining the National Patriotic Front and empowered to push for autonomy. According to a December 1, 1972, air gram from the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State, Arthur L. Lowrie, Principle Officer, reported that although the Ba‘thist regime realized a degree of stability, the Kurds continued as the only organized opposition and were in physical control of a considerable portion of territory along the Iranian border.¹⁶⁸ In a March 29, 1973, memorandum, Kissinger informed Nixon that Barzani was the strongest he had ever been during the past twelve years of struggle. Kissinger further stated about Barzani afforded a buffer force against subversive Iraqi infiltration teams, and occupied a considerable number of Iraqi forces in the north thereby preventing them from offensive adventures elsewhere.¹⁶⁹ American covert backing seemed to be working in favor of both the U.S. and the Iraqi Kurds.

2006), Summary, par. 33, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/summary> (accessed April 7, 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*, 91.

¹⁶⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972*, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), Document 328, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d328> (accessed June 28, 2017).

¹⁶⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976*, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 207, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d207> (accessed June 28, 2017).

The outbreak of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, however, complicated the relationship between the United States and the Iraqi Kurds. When the Soviet Union declined to include Iraq in pre-war consultations, Baghdad, detecting a definite slight, undertook efforts to improve its associations with the West.¹⁷⁰ As U.S.-Iraqi relations advanced with more Iraqi contracts awarded to U.S. companies, Kissinger, who subverted the State Department and took on a disproportionately larger role in Middle Eastern affairs, used his network of back channels to devise a plan to draw Iraq's attention away from the 1973 war by escalating the Iranian-Iraqi conflict.¹⁷¹ The means by which Kissinger undertook to accomplish the scheme involved having the Shah instigate further troubles in Kurdistan.¹⁷² While skirmishes continued between Iraqi and Kurdish forces, Baghdad hoped to fend off a protracted war with the Kurds. In December 1973, the Ba'athist regime offered a revised autonomy plan to Barzani.¹⁷³ During the following three months, Kurdish subversive activity subsided as Barzani and Saddam worked together to arrive at a mutual accord, but to no avail. On March 11, 1974, Saddam presented the Autonomy Law to the Iraqi Kurds, which included articles Barzani felt controversial, and gave Barzani two weeks to accept the plan.¹⁷⁴ The main point of contention continued to revolve around demarcation lines, particularly the oil-rich region of Kirkuk. In addition, disagreements over the structure of financial autonomy, whether the budget for the autonomous region would reside independently or operate as part of the overall Iraqi budget; the formation and authority of the legislative

¹⁷⁰ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 164.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 166.

¹⁷³ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*, 95.

¹⁷⁴ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 335.

council in the autonomous region; the subjection of regional security to the state; and, the supervision by the state on the legality of decisions made by the autonomous bodies.¹⁷⁵ After requesting more funding and advanced military weaponry from the U.S., in which Kissinger spearheaded the White House's consent to a modest increase, Barzani declined Baghdad's autonomy proposal.¹⁷⁶ Emboldened by U.S. and Iranian support, Barzani pressed forward with his agenda of establishing an autonomous government in the Kurdistan region.

FIFTH KURDISH WAR

The Iraqi-Kurdish cease-fire while negotiating the Autonomy Law did not last, and in April 1974, the fifth Kurdish war broke out.¹⁷⁷ America's objective in supporting the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement, principally orchestrated by Kissinger, centered on backing the Shah of Iran as primary U.S. protectorate in the Gulf. In view of the vacuum left by the December 1971 British withdrawal from the region, the U.S. turned to the Shah to maintain security and stability in the area. Cold War concerns dominated when the Soviet Union entered into a treaty with Iraq, Iran's biggest regional rival. In support of Iran and in opposition to Soviet encroachment, the United States provided secret aid to the Iraqi Kurds in an effort to destabilize the Ba'thist regime in Iraq. Kissinger figured prominently in the covert funding of the nationalist movement that ultimately proved detrimental to the Kurdish rebellion. Circumventing the State Department to avoid scrutiny of his plans, Kissinger dealt directly with Helms, at the CIA, to assure covert support to the Iraqi Kurds, with the overall mission to sustain the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 336.

¹⁷⁶ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 170.

¹⁷⁷ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 125.

Shah's regional position of power. In the interest of U.S.-Iranian relations, Kissinger prompted the first direct contact between the KDP and the White House, which resulted in direct financial and military support to the Iraqi Kurds delivered through Iran. While autonomy negotiations between Baghdad and the KDP continued, Kissinger used his considerable authority to subvert the State Department's diplomatic efforts in the Middle East and to increase U.S. support in favor of the Iraqi Kurds' nationalist movement. With the signing of the Algiers Accord and the aftermath that followed, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the Iraqi Kurds lost all financial support, and ultimately the 1974 rebellion against Iraq. Precipitated by Kissinger's decision to withdraw aid to the KDP, the Iraqi Kurds' nationalist movement disintegrated.

IV. THE ALGIERS ACCORD AFTERMATH

Henry Kissinger orchestrated covert support to the Iraqi Kurds in an effort to further America's agenda of assuring Iran's status as a U.S. protectorate in the Persian Gulf. Iran persisted as a firm ally, but the U.S. risked alienating Tehran if the Shah's request to aid the KDP went unmet. By granting assistance to the Iraqi Kurds, Kissinger all but guaranteed Iran's position as a key U.S. ally. Cold War concerns also factored into Kissinger's calculations. By keeping Iran closely aligned with America, the likelihood of Tehran tilting towards the Soviet Union remained minimal. Kissinger secretly supplying the Iraqi Kurds benefited both the U.S. and Iran, while appearing to support Iraqi Kurdish aims for autonomy.

Kissinger seized every opportunity available to him to secure Iran's position in the Gulf, and capitalized on many of his foreign policy successes, such as the Moscow Summit, the May 1972 Tehran meeting, and Nixon's official 1972 China visit, which Kissinger secretly arranged, to further imbed himself in foreign policy making. Those accomplishments enhanced Kissinger's status with the president, and after Rogers' resignation, Nixon appointed Kissinger to the secretary position in September 1973. As previously mentioned, Rogers often felt obstructed in his duties by the National Security Advisor.¹⁷⁸ The tension between Rogers and Kissinger had grown increasingly

¹⁷⁸ The Miller Center, University of Virginia, U.S. Presidents | Richard Nixon, "William P. Rogers (1969-1973) <https://millercenter.org/president/nixon/essays/rogers-1969-secretary-of-state> (accessed June 2, 2018).

acrimonious throughout the first four years of the Nixon administration as the National Security Advisor leveraged his back channel connections to the Iraqi Kurds, bypassed the State Department in communications and notifications, and assumed greater authority in developing and implementing Middle East foreign policy. The covert support to the Iraqi Kurds exemplified one of Kissinger's many back channel maneuverings. Another example of Kissinger's operational methods entailed embarking on what the press dubbed "shuttle diplomacy" in which he assisted with negotiations between Middle Eastern leaders in troop withdrawals and other diplomatic details resulting from the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.¹⁷⁹ Cold War concerns and maintaining open channels for the flow of oil figured prominently in Kissinger's Middle East policy calculations. Providing aid to the Iraqi Kurds nicely fit into Kissinger's strategy of maintaining Tehran as an ally and keeping Iran's foe, Iraq, off balance.

FORD ASSUMES PRESIDENCY

Watergate, a political scandal involving the president, precipitated Nixon's resignation in August 1974. Gerald R. Ford assumed the presidency and maintained Henry Kissinger as both National Security Advisor and Secretary of State. Ford, having limited experience with foreign affairs before taking over the presidency, and seeking to maintain the forward momentum already in progress, relied on Kissinger's expertise to sustain the then current state of affairs. Against the back drop of the Cold War and rising oil prices, Ford became the new commander-in-chief, but Kissinger managed foreign policy.

¹⁷⁹ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 105.

In his concluding volume of memoirs, *Years of Renewal*, Kissinger observed that not since Harry S. Truman had a president inherited such an array of foreign policy challenges in his first weeks in office than Ford.¹⁸⁰ During the same period, Congress exercised increasing oversight, and as time passed, legislated more specific foreign policies than during Nixon's time in office.¹⁸¹ Kissinger's dual positions, however, allowed him to continue wielding considerable influence in foreign policy making. He maintained his firm commitment of covert support to the Iraqi Kurds, and apprised Ford on a "need to know" basis.¹⁸² Kissinger enjoyed a good working relationship with Ford, however, he withheld information from the new president that would hamper Kissinger's overall agenda in the Persian Gulf, which sought to maintain Iran's regional supremacy. The secret plan of supplying Barzani and his Peshmerga conformed to the strategy of assigning regional countries as proxies in the fight against the Soviets. Although Ford continued American arms sales to Iran and U.S. covert backing of the Iraqi Kurds, he took a more cautious stance on new undertakings with the Shah. Ford considered and weighed arguments made by members of his administration and those in Congress who leveled criticisms against the Iranian leader before making decisions.¹⁸³ As president, Ford had the final authority, but Kissinger managed to sway policy to affect the outcomes he hoped to achieve, which involved supplanting direct U.S. military forces in the Gulf region with regional allies.

¹⁸⁰ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 33.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁸² Gibson, *Sold Out?* 170.

¹⁸³ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 129.

OIL PRICES AND EMBARGO

The continuing rise of oil prices, provided Iran and Iraq with growing revenues, which they then poured into additional weapon acquisitions.¹⁸⁴ Between 1967 and 1973, U.S. natural gas reserves significantly dropped from a fifteen year supply to that of less than ten years, which in turn, hastened an increase in oil imports to make up for the shortfalls.¹⁸⁵ During the same period, American oil well drilling precipitously fell as environmental legislation severely hampered those operations.¹⁸⁶ To compensate for the shortages, the U.S. increased oil purchases from countries that also constituted the main members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), founded in 1960.¹⁸⁷ After the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, some members of OPEC, led by Saudi Arabia, instituted an oil embargo against the U.S. and other Western nations for their support of Israel.¹⁸⁸ Both Iran and Iraq formed a part of OPEC. One of the outcomes of the embargo resulted in massive price hikes for petroleum, which negatively impacted the economies of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan.¹⁸⁹ For the U.S., the embargo also highlighted the importance of oil to national security and the necessity of maintaining good relations with OPEC countries to assure American access to oil. For several of the OPEC nations, the rise in oil prices provided an increasing stream of revenue.

¹⁸⁴ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 111; <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262858/change-in-opec-crude-oil-prices-since-1960/>. The price of crude oil doubled between 1970 and 1973, from \$1.21 per barrel to \$2.70 per barrel.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 112, 82. The original five members, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, agreed to form an alliance to protect oil prices.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 164.

As part of his shuttle diplomacy, in November 1973, Kissinger met with the Shah of Iran in Tehran to discuss the state of Middle Eastern affairs and the implications of the oil embargo.¹⁹⁰ During the meeting, the Shah agreed not to join the embargo, and additionally offered to mediate with two other OPEC member countries, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to end the energy crisis.¹⁹¹ The meeting ensured a continuation of strong ties between the U.S. and Iran, particularly in light of the negative impact the Watergate scandal had on America's prestige worldwide. The rise of oil prices also benefited Iraq, which spent its revenues on growing its military capabilities. Viewed through the lens of the Cold War conflict, the increasing strengthen of Iraq's military led to worrying regional ramifications that solidified the importance U.S.-Iranian ties.

Although Ford held a guarded view of the Shah, overall U.S.-Iranian relations remained virtually unaffected by the change in administrations, largely due to Kissinger's continued dual governmental roles. The Shah continued to act as both a conduit and supplier of military weapons to the Iraqi Kurds, mainly financed through oil profits, for the overall purpose of keeping Iraq off balance and the Soviets at bay. The Shah's strategy overlapped with America's over all Cold War plans in the Gulf region. According to Kissinger, the United States sought to provide the Kurds with the ability to continue negotiating with Baghdad for Kurdish recognition, and keep Iraq unbalanced without irrevocably dividing up the country.¹⁹² Iran's goal also included wanting Iraqi concessions concerning the Shatt al-ʿArab, as well as a sustained Iranian presence in Iraqi Kurdistan by means of Barzani and his Peshmerga. The Shah feared that if Barzani were

¹⁹⁰ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 100.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 589.

defeated, Tehran would lose leverage over Baghdad. In addition, Tehran feared that the resulting power vacuum in the Kurdish region might lead to Soviet-backed Iraqi communists taking over the area, an immediate threat to Iran.¹⁹³ As the Iraqi military made significant advances into Kurdish territory in late summer 1974, holding more ground than it had at any time since 1961, Iran and Israel pressed the U.S. to supply heavier artillery to the Iraqi Kurds.¹⁹⁴ Barzani also made separate appeals to the U.S. for increased assistance. Kissinger agreed that the Peshmerga needed advanced weaponry to hold their positions and ward off further losses, but concerns over how to pay and deliver the additional heavy artillery and tanks without revealing U.S. clandestine funding proved formidable.¹⁹⁵ Already, the United States contributed a little more than \$8 million a year in covert Kurdish support.¹⁹⁶

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TO IRAQI KURDS

Originally, the Shah indicated he might dispatch regular troops to assist the Iraqi Kurds, supplementing existing Iranian auxiliary troops dressed as Kurdish Peshmerga.¹⁹⁷ The Iranians deployed to Iraqi Kurdistan two artillery battalions, several mortar platoons and air defense batteries, and surface-to-air missile units.¹⁹⁸ But that stratagem, Kissinger asserted, held additional complications, such as being too open-ended and too hazardous, which he expressed directly to Ford when briefing the new president on the Kurdish operation.¹⁹⁹ Instead, Kissinger suggested another proposition, to which Ford agreed, that entailed arrangements the Secretary of State devised with Israel to provide

¹⁹³ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 111.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁹⁵ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 591.

¹⁹⁶ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 105.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 183.

¹⁹⁹ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 591.

the Iraqi Kurds with \$20 million in Soviet weapons captured by the Israelis during the 1973 war.²⁰⁰ The additional weaponry allowed the Iraqi Kurds to maintain their defenses and buy more time to resupply for the upcoming winter. As well, the delivery of heavy weapons benefited the Shah by keeping Barzani and his Peshmerga militarily viable, thus sidestepping a direct war with Iraq.²⁰¹ Kissinger's plan fulfilled the goals of both the U.S. and Iran without divulging America's covert interests in the region.

IRAQ LAUNCHES MAJOR OFFENSIVE

Initially, the Iraqi Kurds achieved a degree of success in the first month of the war. They employed guerilla tactics to besiege multiple garrisons, and routed supply lines to 12,000 Iraqi troops positioned at critical defensive locations.²⁰² In a crucial move, the KDP captured the town of Rawandiz, an Iraqi army controlled city on a critical route leading to Iran for the Kurds.²⁰³ Barzani and his Peshmerga appeared to be succeeding in their war efforts, and claimed to have the backing of the Kurdish population, as evidenced by tens of thousands of people leaving towns and villages for liberated Kurdish areas.²⁰⁴ In late spring, however, Baghdad launched a major offensive, aided by the Soviets. Unlike any previous onslaught in the past, these new military assaults involved indiscriminate aerial bombings of Kurdish civilian populations.²⁰⁵ Having taken advantage of increased oil revenues to purchase more military hardware from the Soviets, the Iraqi military unleashed an attack against the Iraqi Kurds.²⁰⁶ In breach of the Geneva Convention, the Iraqi air force also dropped napalm bombs and

²⁰⁰ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 108.

²⁰¹ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 138.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁰⁶ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 215.

phosphorous chemicals, obtained from the Soviet Union, on Kurdish villages.²⁰⁷ Along with the bombing tactics, Iraq instituted an economic blockade in Kurdish areas outside of Iraqi control, and burned their agriculture fields and destroyed farm machinery.²⁰⁸ As well, Baghdad employed terror campaigns against the general Kurdish population and encouraged Arab families to move into abandoned Kurdish homes and villages. The Ba‘thist regime hoped to break the popularity of Barzani and the KDP, diminish the call for Kurdish autonomy, and gain support for the Iraqi central government. Although Barzani and the nationalist movement enjoyed popular support, managing to continue attracting thousands of Kurdish volunteers from all over Iraq, an increasing number of Iraqi Kurdish refugees scrambled to the northern border and into Iran.²⁰⁹ The Peshmerga lost ground in late summer, but managed to fortify the remaining territory they held and dug in for the upcoming winter.

The influx of over 100,000 Kurdish refugees into Iran, along with another 400,000 amassed inside Iraq’s northern border, brought about by the Ba‘th regime’s terror operations and the war, caused grave concern for both Barzani and the Shah.²¹⁰ The flood of Kurds into the region created a humanitarian crisis that overextended Barzani’s abilities to manage the situation and strained Iranian resources.²¹¹ As such, both leaders petitioned the U.S. for increased aid to deal with the disaster. The Iraqi Kurdish situation looked ominous from a number of viewpoints. Although Iran’s support to the Iraqi Kurds in the fall of 1974 reached a record level of \$75 million a year, Barzani

²⁰⁷ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 129.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq 1958*, 169.

²¹⁰ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 181.

²¹¹ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 105.

needed additional assistance.²¹² Kissinger also worried that Iran's increasing financial strain, largely due to supporting the Iraqi Kurds, would weaken the Shah's defenses and place the country in a more vulnerable position against Iraq. But, the prospect of revealing the covert activity and asking for additional funding from Congress presented Kissinger with a greater conundrum.²¹³ Ford agreed to the Israeli-Kissinger scheme to provide heavy weapons to the Peshmerga even though Congress increasingly exercised oversight of the executive branch. The Watergate scandal precipitated a leery attitude towards the presidency, and Congress reacted with growing review and monitoring of government agencies and policy implementations. Keeping Kurdish covert support secret from Congress posed a substantial problem for Kissinger, who expressed that Congressional approval for added backing would surely be rejected.²¹⁴ Nonetheless, jeopardizing the Iraqi Kurds' position, and thus Iran, ruled out inaction. As such, Kissinger worked in a back channel manner to keep Tehran supplied. He also managed to push through the previous administration's approved humanitarian aid and the Soviet weaponry transferred to the Iraqi Kurds, as Congress remained shielded from the process.²¹⁵ Through Kissinger, U.S. Cold War policy in the Middle East continued along the same track as it had during Nixon's administration with Iran serving as America's Persian Gulf proxy.

DEAL MAKING

While the Shah lobbied the U.S. for continued support to Barzani, he also explored the possibility of making a deal with the Ba'th regime. When the Shatt al-'Arab

²¹² Gibson, *Sold Out?* 183.

²¹³ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 592.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 591.

²¹⁵ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 170.

dispute turned violent with open skirmishes between Iranian and Iraqi troops in February 1974, Baghdad asked the United Nations to condemn Tehran for its aggressive actions.²¹⁶ After further investigations and in response, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 348 (1974) that called for a resumption of talks between the two countries with “a view to a comprehensive settlement of all bilateral issues.”²¹⁷ Although Tehran persisted with open hostilities against Baghdad, Iranian and Iraqi diplomats began meetings to work on resolving outstanding disputes as directed by the council.²¹⁸ The Shah remained intent on moving Iran’s border on the Shatt al-‘Arab to the boundary prior to the 1937 treaty, as part of his campaign to enhance his dynasty’s image and elevate his stature at home.²¹⁹ Furthermore, he distrusted the Ba‘th regime’s resolve to arrive at an agreement. Nonetheless, negotiations slowly continued between the two countries.

Prior to the start of the 1974 Kurdish War, Iraq began cultivating new economic and political avenues with the West. In April 1974, the Ba‘th regime renewed diplomatic ties with Great Britain, much to the surprise of the U.S. officials in Baghdad.²²⁰ The regime also opened relations with France and West Germany.²²¹ Attempting to diminish the Soviet’s role in Iraq with leaked reports of discord between the two countries, Baghdad pushed towards rapprochement with pro-Western Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt.²²² Although the Soviet Union remained the main

²¹⁶ Ibid., 166.

²¹⁷ *United Nations*, Security Council Resolution 348 (1974) of 28 May 1974, S/RES/348 (1974), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/289/67/IMG/NR028967.pdf> (accessed July 7, 2018).

²¹⁸ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 111.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 137.

²²¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 252, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d252> (accessed July 14, 2018).

²²² Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 137.

supplier of arms to Iraq, and persisted in its involvement in Iraqi oil industries, Baghdad now possessed the financial means to expand beyond the Soviets.²²³

In another unexpected move, Iraqi ambassador to the UN, Talib El-Shibib, signaled to U.S. Ambassador John Scali that the Iraqi regime wanted to enhance U.S.-Iraqi relations.²²⁴ The opening signified the first time since 1967 that Iraq, on an official level, proposed improving U.S.-Iraqi relations.²²⁵ Scali relayed the message to Kissinger, who then asked the Ambassador to respond to El-Shibib with “Secretary welcomes Iraqi readiness to continue this dialogue which he feels will be useful to the interests of both our countries.”²²⁶ Kissinger also expressed interest in inviting El-Shibib to Washington, but without publicity so as to keep the meeting secret.²²⁷ While the overtures marked a willingness to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations, Kissinger maintained steadfast support of Iran and the Iraqi Kurds. In June 1974, Iraq restored relations with the Soviet Union in order to secure more weaponry in its battle against the KDP, and for border protection against Iran.²²⁸ Nevertheless, back channel communications between the U.S. and Iraq persisted.²²⁹ Kissinger acknowledged the value of improving U.S.-Iraqi relations, but the precarious position of the Iraqi Kurds and the importance of keeping the KDP militarily viable outweighed the importance of developing deeper relations with the Ba’th regime. Maintaining the regional strength of Iran, and thus the continuing support to the Iraqi Kurds, remained Kissinger’s priority.

²²³ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 215.

²²⁴ *FRUS*, 1969-76, XXVII, 252.

²²⁵ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 173.

²²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 253, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d253> (accessed August 11, 2018).

²²⁷ *FRUS*, 1969-76, XXVII, 253.

²²⁸ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 174.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

Amidst the various back channel discussions—including UN-directed talks between Iran and Iraq—the Shah began to express some doubt about the Iraqi Kurds' military capabilities in fighting Iraqi forces. In December 1974, the Shah began formulating a contingency plan to thwart the possibility of Iran's artillery, assembled at various border points, falling into the hands of Iraqi forces if Kurdish held positions should fall.²³⁰ The Iraqi Kurds faced incredible odds as the fighting continued. Normally, severe winters blanketed the Zagros Mountains, which would have stymied combat and given the Peshmerga valuable time to regroup. But, an abnormally warm weather pattern allowed for the continuation of Iraqi bombing offensives on Kurdish positions.²³¹ As the war, and support to the Iraqi Kurds, became increasingly costly and risky for Iran, the Shah considered the possibility making a deal with Iraq over the boundary of the Shatt al-ʿArab. While in a meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State in Zürich, Switzerland (February 18, 1975), the Shah informed Kissinger of his openness to consider negotiations with the Baʿth regime.²³² This disclosure to Kissinger revealed the first direct indication of Iran possibly abandoning the Iraqi Kurds. A month earlier, Barzani had sent Kissinger a detailed letter outlining his current political and military situation, and again asked for additional U.S. support.²³³ Kissinger, fully aware of Barzani's position, reminded the Shah that if Iran forsook the Iraqi Kurds in favor of a concession on the Shatt al-ʿArab, the resulting collapse of the Iraqi Kurds would destabilize the entire region.²³⁴ Further, Kissinger warned the Shah against believing any

²³⁰ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 111-112.

²³¹ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 184.

²³² Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 592.

²³³ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 187.

²³⁴ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 593.

assurances the Iraqi regime would give regarding the administration of the Kurdish region.²³⁵ In addition, Kissinger expressed his concern to the Shah that the Soviets would perceive Iran's withdrawal as "symptomatic of the growing weakness of the West," and thus increase "adventurism" in the region.²³⁶ At the end of the meeting, the Shah indicated to Kissinger that he would continue Iran's support of the Iraqi Kurds.²³⁷ Reflecting in his memoirs, Kissinger considered the discussion hypothetical in nature, and not a deal already in progress between Iran and Iraq.²³⁸ Nonetheless, in the appearance of fairness, Kissinger forwarded his impressions of the meeting to President Ford and Simcha Dinitz, Israeli Ambassador to the United States.

Kissinger had the Shah's reassurance of continued Kurdish support, but he reported to both Ford and Dinitz that the Shah felt the Kurds "have had it."²³⁹ Even so, Kissinger replied positively to Barzani's January letter expressing appreciation for the KDP leader's "valiant effort" and indicating Barzani should "send a trusted emissary to Washington to give the US Government further information about the situation."²⁴⁰ Clearly, Kissinger intended to maintain covert support of the Iraqi Kurds and felt he had dissuaded the Shah from abandoning the Peshmerga. Paramount to Kissinger's strategy in the region resided in keeping Iraq "off balance" with fighting the Iranian-backed Iraqi Kurds, thereby diminishing Soviet influence in the region. The secret support to Barzani, made through and with additional assistance from Iran, kept Kissinger's regional plan viable without having to disclose to the U.S. Congress the covert operation. As Kissinger

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 189.

²³⁸ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 592-593.

²³⁹ Ibid., 593.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 594.

extrapolated, if the Shah gave up support of the Iraqi Kurds in favor of settling with Iraq over the Shatt al-‘Arab boundary dispute, Congress, already deeply involved in pulling out of Indochina, would provide neither militarily nor financially support the Iraqi Kurds.²⁴¹ Even Barzani seemed unaware of Iran’s consideration of negotiating with Iraq. Certainly, Kissinger’s reply to the KDP leader led him to understand that support would continue for an autonomous Iraqi Kurdish region, along with military and financial assistance in the fighting.

Prior to the Shah attending the March 1975 OPEC meeting in Algiers, Barzani sent the Iranian leader a message that read, in part, of the Peshmerga’s ability to capture multiple enemy positions, but with heavy casualties.²⁴² In the same statement, Barzani noted, “to hold those positions is impossible for us.”²⁴³ The contents of the letter greatly added to the Shah’s already expressed doubt about the competency of the Iraqi Kurds. When the Shah received words of assurance, communicated through an Egyptian adviser of President Anwar Sadat, that Iraq would reduce their ties with the Soviet Union if Iran would cease military pressure, the fate of the Iraqi Kurds appeared sealed.²⁴⁴ In a deal with the Ba‘th regime, the Shah realized his goal of Iranian sovereignty over the eastern half of the Shatt al-‘Arab. In the same instance, the Iraqi Kurds lost all Iranian support, and with it, the assistance of the United States. The 1975 Algiers Agreement, the Iranian-Iraqi accord signed on March 6, 1975, effectively ceased all Iranian aid to the Iraqi Kurds and their nationalist movement.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 594.

²⁴² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 275, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d275> (accessed August 11, 2018).

²⁴³ *FRUS*, 1969-76, XXVII, 275.

²⁴⁴ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 190.

ALL AID CEASES

Mediated by Houari Boumédiène, President of Algeria, the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq settled border disputes in the Shatt al-‘Arab and the Khuzestan Province. The main provisions handed the Shah control of the eastern side of the river at the thalweg, thus granting Iran unimpeded access to the Shatt al-‘Arab. In return, Hussein succeeded in stopping Iran from funding the Iraqi Kurds. Both countries agreed to work together on border security and favorable relations.²⁴⁵

The stunning announcement of the accord’s adoption caught Kissinger off guard. In his memoir, Kissinger related how the Shah’s “actions were brutal and indefensible.”²⁴⁶ He further added his displeasure with the Iranian leader’s decision and deceptive methods.²⁴⁷ Yet Kissinger admitted the Shah’s pronouncement served Iran’s security needs, and eliminated the additional financial toll on the country in continued support to Barzani and his Peshmerga.²⁴⁸ With the tenuous position of the Iraqi Kurds, Iran would need to make a direct military assault on Iraq to gain any substantial ground.²⁴⁹ That move would precipitate a war between Iran and Iraq, which the Shah did not want. As previously mentioned, the U.S. would be disinclined to back any such Iranian military action. And, any overt American involvement would risk revealing the current U.S. covert activity in the area.

Before holding a joint press conference with Saddam Hussein announcing the agreement, the Shah sent Barzani a one day notice of Iran’s intent. Delivered through an

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 594.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 112.

Iranian general, the stipulations presented to the KDP leader included the closure of the border to all movement; the immediate cessation of all Iranian aid; the allowance of only small Peshmerga groups to take refuge in Iran; and, specifically directed at Barzani, the cautionary note to settle with Iraq on whatever conditions he could muster.²⁵⁰ In communicating with Kissinger, the Shah framed his position in Cold War terms. After relating that the Iraqi Kurds would have one week to resolve whether to stay in Iraq or retreat to Iran, a safe haven, the Shah stressed to the Secretary of State that Iran and Iraq would work jointly to determine which “Kurds were good and which were bad (read Communist).”²⁵¹ The message intended to reassure Kissinger that the region would remain free of communist influences.

Despite giving assurances that Barzani and his Peshmerga had until March 20, 1975, to accept refuge in Iran or face the consequences of staying in Iraq, the Ba‘th regime initiated a full scale assault on the Iraqi Kurds the day after the joint announcement.²⁵² In desperation, Barzani sent Kissinger a letter, on March 10, beseeching him to intervene in the onslaught by using his personal influence with the Shah to help the Iraqi Kurds.²⁵³ Further, Barzani wrote, “Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way with silence from everyone. We feel Your Excellency that the United States has a moral and political responsibility towards our people who have committed themselves to your country’s policy.”²⁵⁴ Truly, the United

²⁵⁰ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 191.

²⁵¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976*, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 276, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d276> (accessed August 11, 2018).

²⁵² Gibson, *Sold Out?* 192.

²⁵³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976*, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 278, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d278> (accessed August 11, 2018).

²⁵⁴ *FRUS, 1969-76, XXVII, 278.*

States, through Kissinger, had invested a considerable amount of money and effort to covertly support the Iraqi Kurds in destabilizing the Ba‘th regime, and consequently thwart Soviet intentions in the region. But, Kissinger saw U.S.-Iranian relations as the primary concern. The Shah remained America’s staunchest ally in the Persian Gulf. If the U.S. pushed back on the Shah’s decision, with no American guarantee of support, the U.S. risked alienating a key ally. And, the U.S. could not overtly fund the Iraqi Kurds without Iran’s support. Since the Shah had ultimately made the decision, Kissinger reasoned the U.S. had little choice but to consent to Iran’s resolve.²⁵⁵ As such, Kissinger let slide a response to Barzani’s urgent plea for help.

The signing of the 1975 Algiers Accord abruptly stopped all aid to Barzani and his Peshmerga, and the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement, as Iran no longer had a need to support the rebellion. Covert funding from the United States halted, as well, with the exception of the March allocation.²⁵⁶ Without the financial and military provisions, and the advanced weaponry needed to fight the Iraqi forces, the Iraqi Kurds were soundly defeated. On March 21, Barzani finally issued an end to all Iraqi Kurdish resistance.²⁵⁷ Less than a week later, Barzani and his family went into exile.²⁵⁸ By the end of the cease-fire on April 1, over 100,000 Iraqi Kurds had crossed over into Iran. Of those Iraqi Kurds who accepted the Ba‘th regime’s terms and stayed in Iraq, their plight consisted of suffering authoritarian rule in Kurdistan²⁵⁹, or resettlement to southern Iraq.²⁶⁰ Through it all, Kissinger remained steadfast in his Cold War strategy and committed to a healthy

²⁵⁵ Kissinger, *Years Renewal*, 595.

²⁵⁶ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 118.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Gibson, *Sold Out?* 195.

²⁶⁰ Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, Shah*, 119.

U.S.-Iranian relationship despite the devastation suffered by the Iraqi Kurds and to their nationalist movement.

In 1976, *the village VOICE* published an article, entitled “A 24-Page Special Supplement: The CIA Report the President Doesn’t Want You to Read. The Pike Papers: An Introduction by Aaron Latham,” describing the findings of the 1975 Pike Committee, headed by U.S. Representative Otis G. Pike. The leaked report, never official released, stated the intent of U.S. covert funding to Barzani and the KDP amounted to keeping Iraq off balance, and not in supporting the Kurdish nationalist movement. The special supplement went further to assert the Pike Committee claimed that Ford, Kissinger and the Shah hoped the Iraqi Kurds “would not prevail,” but instead “sap the resources of our ally’s neighboring country [Iraq].”²⁶¹ The U.S. and Iran failed to disclose the real objective behind their policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, and as such, Barzani fought with the notion that he and the Kurdish nationalist movement had full American support.²⁶² Latham claimed that “even in the context of covert action, ours was a cynical enterprise.”²⁶³ A quote attributed to Kissinger, “Covert action should not be confused with missionary work,” summed up the entire Iraqi Kurdish enterprise.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Aaron Latham, “A 24-PAGE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT: THE CIA REPORT THE PRESIDENT DOESN’T WANT YOU TO READ. The Pike Papers: An introduction by Aaron Latham,” *the village VOICE* (February 16, 1976), 71, <http://jfk.hood.edu/Collection/Weisberg%20Subject%20Index%20Files/P%20Disk/Pike%20Committee%20Report%20Village%20Voice/Item%2005.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2015).

²⁶² Latham, “SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT,” 71.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

V. AMERICA ABANDONS THE IRAQI KURDS

As detailed in the previous chapter, the lead up to and the abrupt 1975 termination of U.S. and Iranian support, and the plight of Barzani and his Peshmerga's resistance, appeared to collapse the Kurdish nationalist movement. This chapter further details America's abandonment of the Iraqi Kurds and their quest for autonomy after the 1975 Algiers Agreement, the dramatic transfer of power in Iran, and the shifting of alliances in the Persian Gulf. Faced with yet more troubles and devastation, an examination of changing U.S. foreign policy in the Gulf and the impact of those transformations on the Kurdish nationalist movement will ensue.

Saddam Hussein, whose power and prestige within the Ba'ath regime had steadily increased, now had the military and political means to deal with the Iraqi Kurds on his terms. No longer seen as posing a threat to national unity, Saddam implemented a series of policies and programs aimed at eliminating any Kurdish resistance. Systematically, the Iraqi regime began destroying whole villages, which totaled some 1,400 communities by 1978.²⁶⁵ The regime also deported upwards to 600,000 Iraqi Kurds to resettlement camps located around major towns, all of which allowed for easy access by the Iraqi military.²⁶⁶ Those newly constructed camps, surrounded by barb wire, included large avenues to allow for easy access by the Iraqi military in the event an uprising needed put

²⁶⁵ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 339.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

down.²⁶⁷ Kurdish families of active Barzani supporters, or refugees that returned after the period of amnesty, found themselves exiled to southern Iraq.²⁶⁸ Immediate execution awaited any Iraqi Kurd found returning to their ancestral lands.²⁶⁹ The relocations to the southern regions of Iraq hit Iraqi Kurds particularly hard as the environment, both climatically and socially, posed a dramatic change from the environs of their homelands.²⁷⁰ Saddam's policies intended to divide and conquer the Kurdish nationalist movement, and to assimilate the Iraqi Kurds into Arab culture.²⁷¹ Programs existed within the resettlement areas to re-educate Kurds on national unity and the virtues of the Iraqi Ba'th doctrine.²⁷² At the same time, the Ba'th regime encouraged and supported Arab Iraqis to settle in formerly predominate Kurdish villages and towns, and awarded money to Arab men who took Kurdish wives.²⁷³ Of those remaining Iraqi Kurds in the north, some received large cash payments, which amounted to a form of bribery to support the government.²⁷⁴ The regime's anticipated outcomes, the elimination of the Kurdish nationalist movement and the integration of Iraqi Kurds into Arab society, led to multiple clashes between Iraqi Kurds and military forces brought about by the forced displacements and the imposed indoctrination programs.²⁷⁵ While many Iraqi government policies accomplished the suppression of a cohesive Kurdish opposition, dissension remained among pockets of Iraqi Kurds.

²⁶⁷ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq 1958*, 188.

²⁶⁸ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 339.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 157.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., 160.

²⁷³ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 340.

²⁷⁴ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq 1958*, 188.

²⁷⁵ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 161.

With Barzani in exile, and the KDP in disarray, the Kurdish nationalist movement seemed all but forgotten. The Shah of Iran held fast to the 1975 Algiers Agreement and allowed no concessions to the Iraqi Kurds. In the interest of maintaining a firm Cold War alliance with Iran, and in favor of U.S. corporations doing business with Iraq, the United States also declined any type of assistance to the Kurds in Iraq. Moreover, no offers of government support, nor relief efforts, came from individual countries or the international community.²⁷⁶ As noted in a May 1, 1975, United States Central Intelligence Agency document, produced in coordination with the State Department, the King of Jordan, Hussein bin Talal, expressed grave concern over the accord and the plight of the Kurds. In the overview, the King hoped a settlement between Iraq and Barzani might be reached to allow for the KDP leader to remain head of the Kurdish community.²⁷⁷ But beyond Jordan's voiced concerns, no efforts were exerted on behalf of the Iraqi Kurds at large. The lack of constraints imposed on Iraq by neighboring countries or the international community allowed the regime to act with impunity.

IRAQ

In fact, the 1975 settlement of the *thalweg* line had averted a full scale Iran-Iraq war, and brought about improved relations among all the Gulf neighbors. The Iraqi Kurds no longer posed an internal threat to the Ba'athist regime by fomenting instability. And, Iran lost any leverage over Iraq with the signing of the accord, which led to improved Iranian-Iraqi relations as the Shah strictly adhered to the agreement. As such,

²⁷⁶ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 340.

²⁷⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976, eds. Monica Belmonte and Edward C. Keefer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 286, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d286> (accessed September 22, 2018).

Iraq turned its focus to domestic economic growth and building up its military power.²⁷⁸ Recognizing its regional strength depended on lessening Iraq's dependence on the Soviet Union, the Ba'ath regime endeavored to project a more nonaligned position.²⁷⁹ In truth, Saddam coveted the role of leader of nonaligned countries.²⁸⁰ He saw Iraq's future, and by extension his role, as the new regional head of the Arab nation. Subsequently, Iraq's diminishing reliance on the Soviet Union paved the way for greater opportunities with the West. Indeed, Iraqi relations with the West improved, particularly with France. Although diplomatic ties with the U.S. remained nonexistent, U.S.-Iraqi economic relations burgeoned.²⁸¹ To that point, the West's increased demand for Iraqi oil, due to the global oil crisis of 1973-1974, greatly benefitted the Iraqi regime and opened previously unavailable pathways to Western technologies.²⁸² While Iraq invested heavily in its military apparatus, the regime also put money into industry, infrastructure, schools, clinics, and hospitals.²⁸³ The Iraqi regime moved to better situate itself in the Gulf region after the 1975 accord. Internally, Saddam positioned himself as the *de facto* leader of Iraq. As Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr's health deteriorated and he withdrew from active politics, Saddam's authority increased exponentially. In July 1979, Saddam formally assumed the presidency.²⁸⁴ Iraq, now under Saddam Hussein, proved a formidable rival for the leadership of the Arab world.

²⁷⁸ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 155.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ *FRUS*, 1969-76, XXVII, 286.

²⁸² Charountaki, *Kurds US Foreign Policy*, 142.

²⁸³ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 340.

²⁸⁴ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 176.

TROUBLES FOR THE SHAH OF IRAN

After 1975, not only did the Iraqi Kurds face harsh conditions, the Shah of Iran faced an increasingly hostile Iranian populace. In 1963, the Shah had launched the White Revolution, a series of social, political, and economic reforms, which he anticipated would elevate the country economically while maintaining a semblance of traditional governance.²⁸⁵ During the following decade, his programs initially succeeded in bringing about many of the anticipated outcomes. Oil revenues helped feed Iran's economic growth, however, infrastructural and industrial developments produced the bulk of the expansion.²⁸⁶ The Shah's land reform, which disenfranchised many large landholders, turned countless sharecroppers into yeoman farmers.²⁸⁷ While the Shah claimed continuing success of his White Revolution, he became progressively isolated from the social and political unrest caused by his restructurings.

Among the critics of the Shah's White Revolution, the Shi'a clergy proved the most vocal. Along with the proposed disenfranchisement of landlords, the *ulama* (Islamic scholars), many of whom were also landowners, would become marginalized by expanding bureaucracy. The land reform threatened to diminish their power, particularly in rural areas where the mullahs served as village mediators in political and social matters, and if a need arose, offered financial assistance to destitute villagers.²⁸⁸ A leading voice of criticism quickly emerged from among the upper clergy, that of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In 1963, after the new policy announcement, Ayatollah Khomeini gave a speech admonishing the Shah for conceding Islam and Iranian

²⁸⁵ Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran: The Pahlavis and After*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), 199.

²⁸⁶ Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 214.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 199.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 247

sovereignty to the West.²⁸⁹ He also derided the Shah for granting rights to women.²⁹⁰ The 1963 address, in which he called the Shah “you wretched, miserable man,” and the ensuing anti-Shah protests in Qom, landed the ayatollah in exile for the next fourteen years.²⁹¹ Qom housed the center for Shi’ite religious study in Iran.²⁹² The Shah’s mounting dependence on the United States, his growing cult of personality, and the purposeful sidelining of the clergy inextricably pitted the ayatollah against the government. In the ten years following the institution of reforms, Iran transitioned into a state heavily supported by petrodollars and the West, deeply submerged in bureaucracy, and led by an increasing isolated autocrat.

Several scholars noted that the Shah’s domestic agenda steered the country towards rebellion as his policies managed to disenfranchise the landed aristocracy, the *ulama*, and *bazaar* merchants.²⁹³ Replaced by technocrats uninterested in personal networks, many small rural farmers and villagers moved to larger urban areas where they found growing urban blight, housing shortages, and rising unemployment.²⁹⁴ Many younger, educated members of the newly made middle class felt betrayed by the Shah’s regime, as promised jobs in the public sector failed to materialize.²⁹⁵ The SAVAK, the Shah’s secret police, dealt severely with dissidents, and in general, harassed common Iranians who spoke out against the government.²⁹⁶ Also perceived as complicit with the Iranian state stood the United States. The Western-style secular democracy urged by the

²⁸⁹ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 291.

²⁹⁰ Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 201.

²⁹¹ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 291.

²⁹² Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East—from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 214.

²⁹³ Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 213; Westad, *Global Cold War*, 293; Tyler, *World Trouble*, 216.

²⁹⁴ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 71.

²⁹⁵ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 293.

²⁹⁶ Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 257.

U.S. contrasted with the mounting anti-imperialism sentiment felt by many. Increasing, larger numbers of Iranians viewed the Shah as a pawn of the United States.²⁹⁷ Iran's domestic situation stood in stark contrast to the Shah's grandiose self-perception as Shahanshah (king of kings).

JIMMY CARTER

U.S.-Iranian relations peaked during Kissinger's tenure. When Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, the 39th president interjected human rights as a central component of America's foreign policy. Although the Shah had enjoyed friendly relations with the U.S. despite the political affiliation of the incumbent president, the new Carter administration posed a quandary largely due to the emphasis on improving human rights around the world.²⁹⁸ Past administrations overlooked charges of human rights violations in Iran, but Carter seized the opportunity of his presidency to call upon the Shah to make meaningful reforms.²⁹⁹ As one of America's key allies in the Middle East, Carter pressed the Shah towards improvements, but declined to make military sales conditional upon Iranian human rights advancements.³⁰⁰ Unlike the relationship enjoyed by the Nixon administration and the Iranian leader, Carter and the Shah experienced an uneasy, and at times tenuous, association. The Shah's visit to the U.S. in November 1977, and Carter's trip to Tehran a month later, intended to show U.S. support for the Iranian government, instead helped fuel domestic unrest in Iran.³⁰¹ In addition to the Shah's growing autocracy and his founding of the Rastakhiz (Resurrection) party, which formed a one

²⁹⁷ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 71.

²⁹⁸ Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 250.

²⁹⁹ Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 258.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 72.

party system, the cumulative influence of the West on Iran intensified tensions within the country.³⁰² Iran sat on the verge of political explosion.

These historical forces led to the Iranian Revolution, a series of events between 1978-1979 that toppled the Shah of Iran and his government in December 1978.³⁰³ The new Islamic Republic, eventually led by Khomeini, rejected Western imperialism in favor of an anti-Western theocracy.³⁰⁴ In the opinion of many Iranians, they equated the United States as equal an enemy as the Shah. Initially, the United States prevaricated on how best to respond to the open hostilities and rebellion against the Shah prior to his ouster. Caught between his human rights stance and the understanding that armed forces might be required to put down the revolution, Carter is accused of equivocating as he understood the vital role Iran played in protecting America's access to Persian Gulf oil and containing Soviet encroachment in the region.³⁰⁵ Equally divided, Carter's administration counseled the president with opposing views on the course of action the Shah should take.³⁰⁶ In the lead-up to the Shah's departure from Iran, Carter neglected to call the Shah directly.³⁰⁷ His indecision to personally advise the Iranian leader reflected the administration's dueling Iranian policy between human rights reformers and military hawks.³⁰⁸ Although the administration's foreign policy agenda with its emphasis on human rights contributed less to the Iranian Revolution than the Shah's own policies, Carter's vacillation added to the Shah's own uncertainties. Those insecurities led to the

³⁰² Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 233.

³⁰³ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 295.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Tyler, *World Trouble*, 222.

³⁰⁶ Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 259.

³⁰⁷ Tyler, *World Trouble*, 224.

³⁰⁸ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 248. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Shah to take both a military stance and a conciliatory position.³⁰⁹ In the end, neither the Shah nor the U.S. could stop the forces of anti-Pahlavian rule and anti-Western sentiment.

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

November 4, 1979, proved the effective date of severed relations between the U.S. and Iran.³¹⁰ After the collapse of Iran's secular provisional government, and preceding the referendum vote on the new Islamic Republic constitution with Khomeini as its leader, Iranian students took to the streets in protest and seized sixty-three Americans as hostages from the U.S. embassy in Tehran.³¹¹ Anger over Carter's decision to allow the deposed Shah to enter the U.S. for medical treatment precipitated the capturing of the U.S. embassy.³¹² In response, Carter froze Iranian assets in U.S. banks, expelled both Iranian diplomats and students from America, initiated international financial sanctions against Iran along with obtaining a censure from the International Court of Justice, and finally, cut diplomatic ties with the new Iranian regime.³¹³ The release of American hostages occurred later on January 20, 1981.³¹⁴ The warm association between the United States and Iran, initially based on Cold War concerns and easy U.S. access to Middle Eastern oil, evaporated into a decidedly adversarial relationship.

The signing of the Algiers Agreement contributed to a series of events that ultimately toppled the Shah of Iran, placed Khomeini in control of the country, and

³⁰⁹ Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 261.

³¹⁰ Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 288.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 74.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 76.

severed U.S.-Iranian relations. Beginning with the Shah's loss of confidence in the Iraqi Kurds' fighting ability against the Ba'ath regime, and emboldened by the ostensibly unconditional support of the United States, the Shah negotiated a boundary settlement with Saddam. With the Iraqi Kurds then firmly under the control of Iraq and posing no real threat to the Iraqi regime, Iranian-Iraqi relations warmed considerably. The tentative alliance allowed for the opening of previously closed borders and the resumption of Iranian pilgrimages to Karbala and Najaf, Iraq.³¹⁵ Both cities play significant religious roles in Shi'a Islam. Khomeini's growing prominence and ability to communicate more readily with his Iranian followers, who visited the exiled ayatollah in Iraq while on pilgrimage and transported his messages back to Iran via cassette tapes, threatened the Shah. The opening with Baghdad after 1975 provided the Shah with an opportunity to ask Saddam to remove Khomeini from Iraq, thus relieving Tehran of the perceived threat from the cleric. In actuality, Iraq's deportation of Khomeini to Paris in 1978 opened a larger, more readily available avenue for revolutionary thought to reach Iranians already fomenting dissent against the Shah.³¹⁶ The Shah of Iran's expectations, beginning with his reassessment of Iraqi Kurds' capabilities in December 1974, and their subsequent impact, eventually led to his deposition.

THE CARTER DOCTRINE

Although Carter lost his bid for re-election, the Carter Doctrine he initiated in January 1980, stating the vital importance of the Persian Gulf to U.S. interests and any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the region would be met with military action, if needed, provided the framework for the incoming administration of Ronald W.

³¹⁵ Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 255.

³¹⁶ Westad, *Global Cold War*, 294.

Reagan.³¹⁷ The Carter Doctrine also disclosed U.S. concerns that the revolutionary atmosphere, actively propagated by Iranian leaders, would spread to other Middle Eastern states with large Shi'a populations, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.³¹⁸ Carter's change in foreign policy emphasis, nonetheless, exhibited Cold War concerns. His doctrine revealed U.S. fears that the anti-American sentiment in Iran could lead that country to closer ties with the Soviet Union. More importantly, the Soviet's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan greatly added to U.S. concerns that Moscow might have further designs to control oil assets in the Middle East.³¹⁹ Carter's unsuccessful diplomacy efforts in Iran, which included eschewing direct contact with Khomeini, and the Soviet Union's move in Afghanistan, led him to take a more traditional Cold War stance that included attempts at a military build-up in the Gulf region, increased covert activity in Iran, and an overall increase in defense spending.³²⁰ Foregoing his former human rights emphasis in foreign policy, Carter reverted to a Cold War stance that placed Soviet containment as a top U.S. priority.

SADDAM TAKES CHARGE

After the signing of the Camp David Accords, dynamics in the Middle East changed further when Saddam Hussein assumed a more active political role in the region. When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed the 1978 agreement, the Arab League, formed in 1945 to champion Arab states interests, expelled Egypt from its ranks.³²¹ With Egypt no longer the head of the Arab League, Saddam made moves to claim a leadership

³¹⁷ Tyler, *World Trouble*, 242.

³¹⁸ Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 146.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 243

³²⁰ Ibid., 230, 243; Sargent, *Superpower Transformed*, 292.

³²¹ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 64.

role in the Arab world.³²² He also worked diligently to solidify his position within Iraq. During the same period, the Iraqi regime began distancing itself from the Soviet Union, as evident by al-Bakr's anniversary speech on July 17, 1978, in which no mention of the Soviet Union or the Soviet Friendship Treaty occurred.³²³ After Saddam became president and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Carter's administration cautiously reached out to the new Iraqi head of state with overtures for more, open relations, all in an attempt to counter possible Soviet moves in the region.³²⁴ Nevertheless, U.S.-Iraqi relations remained negligible as Saddam focused on consolidating his power, particularly in the Kurdish areas and among the Shi'a, and solidifying Iraq as the pivotal Arab state.³²⁵ Although Iraq benefitted from good trading relations with the West, Saddam saw no benefit in improved U.S.-Iraqi relations. In fact, Saddam positioned himself as the principal leader of anti-imperialism in the region, and as such, he shunned any signs of weakness by avoiding alignment with either of the two super powers. Saddam felt secure in his regional military standing and growing international presence.

With Khomeini's vocal call for the spread of the Islamic revolution into Iraq, Saddam redoubled his efforts to champion secular Arab nationalism in the Middle East.³²⁶ The animosity between the two leaders not only stemmed from their opposing ideologies, but from the animus Khomeini felt for Saddam after being expelled from Iraq in 1978.³²⁷ Sensing a possible risk to his regime, and suspecting the splintering Iranian military indicated a weakness in Khomeini's leadership, Saddam challenged the 1975

³²² Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 166.

³²³ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq 1958*, 205.

³²⁴ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 34.

³²⁵ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 230.

³²⁶ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 181.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

Shatt al-‘Arab agreement.³²⁸ His move signaled Iraq’s intent to reclaim and fortify the territory lost to Iran, and shore up the country’s status in the Gulf.³²⁹ A week after Saddam officially abrogated the 1975 agreement, in September 1980, Iraqi forces crossed over into Iranian.³³⁰ The Iran-Iraq War began in earnest.

IRAQI KURDS SPLINTER

While Saddam flexed his military might against Iran, the now fractured Iraqi Kurds continued their hit-and-run tactics against the regime; however, the two major factions spent as much energy fighting each other for control of the overall Kurdish nationalist movement as they did Saddam’s government.³³¹ After the death of Mullah Mustafa Barzani in 1979, his two sons, Idris and Masoud, took command of the KDP.³³² A former lieutenant of the elder Barzani, Jalal Talabani, disgruntled with the direction of the movement, broke from the KDP and formed the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).³³³ Talabani’s umbrella organization challenged the KDP for what he saw as “the inability of the feudalist, tribalist, bourgeois rightist and capitulationist Kurdish leadership” to assert autonomy for Iraqi Kurds.³³⁴ The intense conflict between the rivals would last until May 1987 when the two groups joined other smaller Kurdish militant groups, the Iraqi Communist Party, and the Assyrian Democratic Movement, an ethnic political party in Iraq, to form a Kurdistan Front.³³⁵ As previously discussed, within Iraq, the Kurds themselves experienced major turmoil, characterized by resettlement,

³²⁸ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 231.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 182.

³³¹ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 234.

³³² Ibid., 213.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 343.

³³⁵ Ibid., 352.

Arabization in many sectors of Iraqi Kurdistan, and the bitter fighting between the KDP and the PUK for control of the nationalist movement. The Kurdistan region churned with upheaval and open rebellion as the Kurds fought each other, and continued their on-going battle with the Iraqi regime.

Although ideologically divided, the two major Kurdish nationalist camps caused additional trouble for Saddam as each claimed to represent the movement. Talabani's faction, more left-leaning, democratic, and possessing a socialist political philosophy, stood in contrast to the KDP, who tended towards the traditional and conservative, and ascribing to a tribal political philosophy.³³⁶ Saddam now faced negotiating with both competing factions over the governance of Iraqi Kurdistan. At the same time, the KDP and the PUK fought against the Iraqi regime, and on occasion, the KDP along with Iran against the Iraqi regime.³³⁷ The level of Iranian assistance to the KDP in no way reached that of the Shah's Kurdish policy.³³⁸ While minimal aid passed from Iran to Iraqi Kurds, Saddam supported the Iranian Kurdish opposition against Khomeini.³³⁹ Both Iran and Iraq employed the Kurds in order to gain an upper hand in the war, but both regimes neglected to support an autonomous region. The United States, for its part, maintained a non-committal attitude towards Iraqi Kurdish autonomy and refrained from offering any financial or military support as it had during the Shah's reign.

³³⁶ The Kurdish Project, <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-nationalism/puk-patriotic-union-of-kurdistan/> (accessed November 23, 2018).

³³⁷ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 172-173.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

RONALD REAGAN AND THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

U.S.-Iranian relations changed little when Ronald Reagan won the 1980 presidential election. Taking office one minute before the release of the American hostages in Iran, Reagan enjoyed the successful freeing of the embassy officials Carter had worked so diligently to achieve. Despite the release, Iran remained a hostile nation as Khomeini continued to espouse anti-American rhetoric and labeled the U.S. as “the Great Satan.”³⁴⁰ The dual threats of spreading Islamic fundamentalism and Cold War concerns of Soviet encroachment, however, led the new administration to tilt towards Saddam’s regime to counter those perceived menaces. As previously mentioned, the grave concern of Islamic radicalism spreading outward from Iran into neighboring states occupied much attention in forming America’s foreign policy. Nonetheless, the U.S. officially maintained a position of neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).³⁴¹ With Soviet-Iraqi relations at a low point, and American companies increasing business with Iraq, Baghdad seemed the logical regime to support in the Persian Gulf. The Soviets had pledged neutrality at the onset of the Iran-Iraq War, and went so far as turning back two ships loaded with arms originally destined for Iraq.³⁴² Saddam viewed the Soviets’ stance as unacceptable.³⁴³ As such, Reagan assessed the situation as advantageous to America’s interest and focused his administration on building U.S.-Iraqi relations to thwart Iranian ambitions and counter Soviet expansion in the region.

At the heart of America’s interest in the Middle East lay easy accessibility to oil. As part of Saddam’s calculations in launching a war with Iran, he sought to gain control

³⁴⁰ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 34.

³⁴¹ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 82.

³⁴² Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 38.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39.

of Iran's Khuzestan Province, a major oil producing region.³⁴⁴ Aside from the prestige a conquest would earn him in the Arab world, the oil seized from the capture would greatly enhance Saddam's reserves and revenue.³⁴⁵ Initially making advances into Iranian territory, Saddam appeared to have the upper hand in the war.³⁴⁶ But in 1982, Iran made huge gains with an effective counteroffensive that pushed Iraqi forces back across the border and into Iraq.³⁴⁷ In June 1982, Saddam called for a cease-fire and offered an Iraqi withdrawal to the established international borders.³⁴⁸ Khomeini rejected the proposition, and in the following years, the war widened. One of the main targets of both countries included targeting each other's oil facilities and oil tankers in the hopes of disrupting, and cutting off, oil revenues necessary to fund their war efforts.³⁴⁹ As the war spilled over into the Persian Gulf, and America's access to Gulf oil at stake, the U.S. began sharing intelligence satellite imagery with Iraq to assist with Iraqi defensive moves against Iran.³⁵⁰ The dual threat of Iran's Islamic fundamentalism extending into Iraq, and more importantly, possible limitations on Western oil supplies, moved the Reagan administration to tangibly act in Iraq's favor.

REAGAN REMOVES IRAQ FROM TERRORISM LIST

While acknowledging the ruthlessness of Saddam and his regime, Iran's 1982 war gains caused the White House greater apprehension. The threat of spreading Islamic fundamentalism outweighed U.S. unease over Saddam's tactics and support of dissent groups, separatist organizations, and the Abu Nidal organization, a splinter group from

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 41.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 183.

³⁴⁷ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 82.

³⁴⁸ Marr, *Modern History Iraq*, 183-184.

³⁴⁹ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 235.

³⁵⁰ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 46.

the Palestine Liberation Organization.³⁵¹ Consequently, the Reagan administration took concrete steps to assist Saddam by removing Iraq from the United States' State Sponsors of Terrorism list on February 26, 1982.³⁵² By doing so, the move allowed for the offering of U.S. export credits and the loosening of export controls.³⁵³ Now off the terrorist list, the available U.S. Agriculture Department Commodity Credit guarantees provided a mechanism for Saddam to purchase much needed food supplies, which prior cash strapped Iraq lacked the ability to obtain.³⁵⁴ The guarantees enabled Iraq to make purchases of badly needed grain and other agricultural commodities to support its struggling domestic population. Full diplomatic relations with Iraq occurred two years later, but the path forward started with Iran's 1982 war advantage and America's fear of Islamic fundamentalism spreading into Iraq.

OPERATION STAUNCH AND THE IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

Concurrent to surreptitiously supporting Saddam in the Iran-Iraq War, the Reagan administration initiated a plan, Operation Staunch, to stem the flow of arm sales by American allies to Iran.³⁵⁵ Paradoxically, from 1985 to 1986, the Reagan administration clandestinely sold weapons to Iran in exchange for U.S. hostages taken in Lebanon by radical Islamic groups supported by Khomeini.³⁵⁶ The White House diverted profits from those sales to fund the Nicaraguan Contras, the American-backed counterrevolutionaries fighting the Sandinista (Sandinista National Liberation Front) regime, led by Daniel Ortega.³⁵⁷ After exposure, the arrangement became known as the

³⁵¹ Tyler, *World Trouble*, 276.

³⁵² Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 33.

³⁵³ Ibid., 42.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 57.

³⁵⁶ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 83.

³⁵⁷ Tyler, *World Trouble*, 310.

Iran-Contra Affair.³⁵⁸ Later, the White House maintained the main purpose of the weapons sales were intended to ease U.S.-Iranian relations.³⁵⁹ Even though the scheme appeared to influence the release of the hostages, it precipitated more hostage taking in the Middle East.³⁶⁰ And, U.S.-Iranian relations remained as they had prior to the hostages' release. The opposing White House agendas demonstrated the administration's inability to effectively develop a cohesive Middle East plan nor exercise diplomatic efforts to effect or direct events in favor of American aims in the region. The Iran-Iraq War raged on in a battle of attrition.

U.S. ASSESSES IRAQI KURDS' THREAT LEVEL

At no time since the 1975 cessation of aid to Barzani and the KDP did the U.S. give any official consideration to the Iraqi Kurds' plight. Even though the Kurdish nationalist movement, now fractured into several splinter groups and led by one of the two main camps, the KDP or the PUK, persisted with continuous and multiple skirmishes against Iraqi forces along the Kurdistan borders, the United States deemed the nationalist movement inconsequential to U.S. aims in the region. The CIA kept track of the Iraqi Kurdish dissidents' activities, but determined they posed no actual danger to Saddam's regime.³⁶¹ A CIA assessment report, issued December 23, 1983, clearly outlined the agency's perception that the Iraqi Kurds lacked the ability to form a common front against Saddam, as their animosity towards each other precluded any ability to coordinate a real threat to the Iraqi regime.³⁶² The assessment also commented that both Kurdish

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 308.

³⁵⁹ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 83.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act, CREST Document Number: CIA-RDP84S00927R0002001300004-5, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84S00927R0002001300004-5.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2017).

³⁶² CIA, FOIA, CIA-RDP84S00927R0002001300004-5.

camps maintained minimal contact with the Soviet Union, so the possibility of Soviet involvement in favor of the Iraqi Kurds remained negligible.³⁶³ As America's primary concern in the region remained the security of the Persian Gulf and the maintaining of international shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the U.S. gave little weight to the Iraqi Kurds' battles with Iraq.³⁶⁴ The focus of America's Gulf policy centered on supporting Iraq as the least objectionable belligerent, and the country that would award more favorable outcomes for the United States at the end of the war.

U.S. RESTORES DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH IRAQ

In November 1984, the United States restored diplomatic relations with Iraq.³⁶⁵ The reinstatement allowed for more intelligence sharing and an increase in the issuance of U.S. dual-use technology (technologies used for civilian purposes but also possessing military applications) licenses.³⁶⁶ Since 1974, Iraq had acquired weapons and chemical weapon technology and components from Western nations, primarily France, Germany, and Italy, with the full knowledge of the White House.³⁶⁷ Although the official U.S. position on the Iran-Iraq War remained one of neutrality, the Reagan administration undertook a more determined position with economic and military aid to Iraq after the restoration of official diplomacy.

As early as 1974, it was intimated that the Iraqi regime employed chemical warfare against its Kurdish population.³⁶⁸ In a December 19, 1983, status report on

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ *Federation of American Scientists*, Intelligence Resource Program, Official Documents, National Security Decision Directives 114, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-114.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2018).

³⁶⁵ Hahn, *Crisis Crossfire*, 83.

³⁶⁶ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 50.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 45.

³⁶⁸ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 129.

National Security Decision Directive 114, which outlined U.S. policy toward the Iran-Iraq War, to Robert C. McFarlane, the National Security Advisor, implicated Iraq on the use of chemical weapons against Iran.³⁶⁹ More, substantiated reports surfaced in early 1984, issued by the United Nations Security Council, that Saddam revived the use of chemical agents.³⁷⁰ The targeted areas of chemical weapons use occurred along the border regions between Iraq and Iran. As early as 1983, the CIA reported, Iraq dropped chemical bombs in the Hajj Umran and Mount Kordeman region and areas in the Penjwin district, locales heavily populated by Kurds.³⁷¹ Saddam, in direct violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol Banning the Use of Chemical Weapons in War, which Iraq signed in 1931, denied the use of chemical warfare.³⁷² The White House protested Saddam's use of chemicals, and led the UN condemnation against Iraq.³⁷³ In addition, the Reagan administration halted sales of five chemical compounds to Iraq, and Iran, which at the time had not been implicated in the use of chemical weapons.³⁷⁴ The cessation of sales to both countries intended to emphasize U.S. neutrality in the war.³⁷⁵ Nonetheless, U.S.-Iraqi relations progressed forward with increased U.S. economic and military aid to support Iraq in the war while the Reagan administration ignored the end use of the

³⁶⁹ *Central Intelligence Agency*, Freedom of Information Act, CREST Document Number: CIA-RDP85M00363R000400740033-5, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85M00363R000400740033-5.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2017).

³⁷⁰ *United Nations*, Security Council, Document S/16433, "Report of the Specialists Appointed by the Secretary General to Investigate Allegations by the Islamic Republic of Iran Concerning Use of Chemical Weapons," March 26, 1984, <http://undocs.org/S/16433> (accessed December 1, 2018).

³⁷¹ *Central Intelligence Agency*, Freedom of Information Act, CREST Document Number: 0001030207, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001030207.pdf (accessed December 9, 2018).

³⁷² Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 48-49.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *Central Intelligence Agency*, Freedom of Information Act, CREST Document Number: CIA-RDP90-00965R000302640026-2, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90-00965r000302640026-2> (accessed May 12, 2017).

³⁷⁵ CIA, FOIA, CIA-RDP90-00965R000302640026-2.

provisions. No action, or official communique, emanated from the U.S. government to specifically aid those Iraqi Kurds or Kurdish villages hit with chemical gas.

In a March 31, 1984, *New York Times* article, written by Bernard Gwertzman and entitled “U.S. Restricts Sale of 5 Chemicals to Iraq After Poison Gas Report,” John Hughes, the State Department spokesman, stated “in humanitarian terms, we cannot and should not limit our attention to the victims of chemical weapons.”³⁷⁶ Hughes further added that Iran’s attempt to spread revolution throughout the region held the greatest concern. The loss of life resulting from Iran’s exertions far outweighed any concern of Saddam’s use of poisonous gas, which might affect civilian populations. In the same article, other State Department officials claimed “that so far, Iraq had used nerve gas only experimentally, not in a concerted fashion.”³⁷⁷ Clearly, the Reagan administration attempted to distance itself from Iraq’s end use of technologies sold through the U.S. and its allies. Although the American Secretaries of State and Commerce adopted a change in policy to scrutinize each export license application for its end purposes, within a year, previously denied licenses started getting approved.³⁷⁸ Part of the rationale for changing course and loosening export controls stemmed from the overarching concern of the Soviet Union gaining a foothold in the Gulf and the fear of Iran succeeding in the war. Therefore, the alliance of convenience with Iraq entailed the Reagan administration turning a blind eye to Iraqi use of chemical weapons.

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³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 50.

The KDP and PUK remained adversaries during the Iran-Iraq War until 1986, when Talabani came to the realization that Saddam had no intentions of signing any type of Iraqi Kurdistan autonomy agreement with the PUK.³⁷⁹ Bolstered by U.S., Soviet, and French backing, and assured his regime would be sufficiently supported in the war, Saddam concluded that concessions in the form of limited regional autonomy to the PUK in exchange for continued assistance on the Kurdistan front no longer served his purposes.³⁸⁰ Talabani, thoroughly dissatisfied with Saddam's stalling on signing an autonomy agreement, changed political association and allied with the KDP against the Iraqi regime.³⁸¹ With the KPD and PUK working in concert, and along with Iran, the fighting against Iraqi forces intensified, particularly in the northern border regions with Turkey and Iran.³⁸² Saddam retaliated with increasing ferocity in Kurdish population areas.

The Iraqi regime stepped up its ongoing campaign of revenge massacres and summary executions of Iraqi Kurds; abductions of Kurdish children, youth, and young men for torture in hopes of garnering information on Peshmerga relatives and activities; and, demolishing Kurdish villages.³⁸³ In a concerted effort to reassert his government control over Iraqi Kurdistan, Saddam appointed his kinsman, 'Ali Hasan al-Majid, later dubbed Chemical Ali by Iraqis, as governor of the North on March 29, 1987.³⁸⁴ A month after his appointment, al-Majid ordered a chemical attack on the Kurdish villages of Balisan and Shaykh Wassan, a prelude to the all-out assault yet to come.³⁸⁵ The violent

³⁷⁹ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*, 99.

³⁸⁰ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 350.

³⁸¹ Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*, 99.

³⁸² CIA, FOIA, 0001030207.

³⁸³ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 352.

³⁸⁴ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 178.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

campaign against Iraqi Kurdish resistance, called *al-Anfal* (the spoils of war), began in earnest in February 1988.³⁸⁶ In a scorched earth policy devised by al-Majid, Iraqi forces unloaded chemical bombs and high explosive air attacks on Peshmerga controlled areas.³⁸⁷ An area hit hard by aerial bombardment, the Jafati valley near Sulaymaniyah, resulted in heavy casualties and devastation of the countryside.³⁸⁸ The number of fatalities sustained and the severity of the losses prompted Talabani to register a formal accusation of genocide against the Iraqi regime.³⁸⁹ Yet, al-Majid kept up with the use of chemical weapons and heavy shelling to inflict as much destruction as possible in Iraqi Kurdish areas. The Kurdish resistance began wearing down from such onslaughts. On March 15, 1988, in retaliation for PUK and Iranian units capturing the town of Halabja, the Iraqi military unleashed a barrage of shelling that far surpassed previous offensives.³⁹⁰ The afternoon's air took on a smell of apples and garlic, and by the following morning, over 5,000 people lay dead.³⁹¹ Forever etched in the Iraqi Kurdish collective memory would be the massacre of Halabja.

The international response to Saddam's use of chemical bombs and the annihilation of thousands of Iraqi Kurds called for the condemnation of Iraq and the immediate suspension of weapons and materials used in the manufacture of chemical weapons.³⁹² As in the past, Saddam denied the use of chemical warfare. Further, he refused entry of any investigative groups into Iraq as he considered any such examination

³⁸⁶ Tripp, *History Iraq*, 245.

³⁸⁷ McDowall, *Modern History Kurds*, 357.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 358.

³⁹² Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 184.

meddling into his country's internal affairs.³⁹³ Once again, the Reagan administration sponsored another UN Security Council resolution calling for tightening of export controls on many items used in the development of chemical weapons.³⁹⁴ The European Parliament also issued a formal condemnation of Iraq's application of chemical warfare and extermination of thousands of Kurdish civilians.³⁹⁵ Correspondingly, the United States Congress delivered similar resolutions. But no sanctions were imposed by the U.S., the UN, or the European Community.³⁹⁶ Despite the White House publically condemning Saddam's use of chemical weapons against the Iraqi Kurds, the Reagan administration continued with military planning support to Iraq.³⁹⁷ In Patrick Tyler's *New York Times* article, entitled "Officers Say U.S. Aided Iraq In War Despite Use Of Gas," Colonel Walther P. Lang, retired, the senior defense intelligence officer at the time, stated both DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) and CIA officials "were desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose."³⁹⁸ The Reagan administration clearly disregarded the plight of Iraqi Kurds and the enormous loss of Kurdish civilian lives. Further, the White House adopted a "no-contacts" policy towards the Iraqi Kurds.³⁹⁹ When Talabani made a visit to the State Department after the Halabja attack, Saddam registered strong disapproval of U.S. officials meeting with his opposition.⁴⁰⁰ On a second attempt to meet

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 76.

³⁹⁵ Bengio, *Kurds Iraq*, 184.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Patrick E. Tyler, "OFFICERS SAY U.S. AIDED IRAQ IN WAR DESPITE USE OF GAS," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, August 18, 2002, found within ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/92313341> (accessed June 25, 2017).

³⁹⁸ Tyler, "OFFICERS SAY"

³⁹⁹ Jentleson, *Friends Like These*, 76.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

with State Department officials, Talabani received a resounding snub.⁴⁰¹ Once a strong supporter of the Iraqi Kurds, the United States now flatly refused any help.

The end of the Iran-Iraq War occurred in July 1988 when Iran accepted the terms laid out in the UN Security Council Resolution 598 of 1987.⁴⁰² Iraqi Kurdish morale, devastated by Saddam's policies and chemical warfare, sank further as Iraq could now turn its full attention to the administration of Iraqi Kurdistan and retaliation against the Kurds who fought against the regime during the war. The Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement, once again, floundered as sheer survival of the Kurdish population took precedence. Physically and morally shattered, the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement, as it had been, ceased to exist.

Reagan's policies on the Persian Gulf greatly impacted Kurdish aims for statehood. By ignoring the West's sale of arms and chemicals to Iraq, and directly providing those same materials to Saddam's regime, the United States directly contributed to the demise of the Iraqi Kurdish national movement. The Reagan administration focused solely on building U.S.-Iraqi relations and preventing Iranian aims of spreading Islamic fundamentalism than on implications of selling arms and chemicals to Saddam's regime. Without U.S. assistance, through the restoration of U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations and the issuance of Commodity Credit guarantees, Saddam's ability to purchase materials and weaponry would have been severely diminished. The sale of U.S. dual-use technologies allowed Saddam's regime to develop and deploy chemical agents on Iraqi Kurdish villages and Peshmerga outposts, which ultimately devastated the population and the countryside. Despite reports of Iraq's use of chemical warfare, the

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Tripp, *History Iraq*, 239.

U.S. ignored the warnings, continued to sell Saddam armament and chemical agents, and neglected to sanction Iraq for its use of chemical weapons. Ultimately, the United States' policy on Iraq inflicted a disastrous blow to the Kurdish nationalist movement. Despite the devastation to the movement, and the scattering of tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds to other countries, the struggle for autonomy lived on to see a renewed quest for self-rule.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Iraqi Kurds' quest for a nation state began after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. They showed remarkable resilience, and continue to do so, in the face of adversity brought about by Middle East regional and international powers that imposed policies in favor of provincial governments that reinforced imperial authority prior to and during World War II. In the Cold War era, when America's strategic interest in the Middle East increased and centered on containment of Soviet encroachment and easy accessibility to oil, the Iraqi Kurds played a tactical yet subservient role in U.S. strategies devised to back America's interests and those of its Middle East allies. Those U.S. policies capitalized on Iraqi Kurdish aims for autonomy, while neglecting to back the Kurds' political ambitions. Beginning with America's Persian Gulf policy that upheld Iranian supremacy in the region, the U.S. exploited Iraqi Kurd's goals by secretly arranging financial aid and military weaponry through Iran and Israel. America's interest in the Iraqi Kurds hinged on keeping Iran regionally and politically strong thereby encouraging Iraqi Kurds in open rebellion against Iraqi forces to Iran's advantage. Construed by Iraqi Kurds as support for their goal, the initial diplomatic contact between U.S. officials and KDP leadership in 1972 buoyed Kurdish ambitions. However, U.S. interest only resided with continuing Iranian hegemony in the Gulf and not with the Kurdish nationalist movement. Although providing for aid to Iraqi Kurdish fighters, the U.S. declined any formal, or informal, backing for Kurdish

autonomy. America's encouragement to the KDP centered on satisfying the Shah's request for assistance to the Iraqi Kurds in his battle with the Iraqi regime, not in providing diplomatic support for a separate Kurdish state. The U.S. possessed no interest in the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement as America saw no benefit to the U.S. in Iraqi Kurdish autonomy. In fact, the arming of the Iraqi Kurdish rebellion against the Ba'athist state characterized another military mechanism in the Shah's arsenal in his battle with Iraq over the Shatt al-'Arab, and maintaining his regional power. White House support to the Iraqi Kurds balanced on the U.S. maintaining a good relationship with the Shah. At no time did a push for an independent state for Iraqi Kurds play into U.S. policy decisions in the Gulf region. The purpose served by the U.S. backing the Iraqi Kurds rested on continuing positive U.S.-Iranian relations.

Following the Iranian Revolution, the severance of U.S.-Iranian relations, and the onset of the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqi Kurds' nationalist movement again suffered severe consequences from America's Middle East policy. As U.S. policy in the Gulf region tilted towards Saddam's regime in an effort to counter the perceived threat from Islamic fundamentalism, the Iraqi Kurds' rebellion against the Iraqi central government and ambition for autonomy collided with America's evolving relations with Saddam's regime. Despite lacking any noteworthy diplomatic, military, or economic support from foreign entities, the Iraqi Kurds continued to skirmish with Iraqi forces along the Kurdistan borders. For Iraqi Kurds, the nationalist movement persisted despite the intense infighting between the two major competing groups, the KDP and the PUK, and the battle for daily survival against Saddam's forces. The U.S. monitored Iraqi Kurdish activity, but determined they posed no threat to Baghdad. With America's Persian Gulf

policy in the region centered on the ready availability of oil, Cold War concerns, and stemming the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, supporting the Iraqi Kurds' nationalist movement offered no additional benefits to the U.S. in terms of achieving America's objectives in the Persian Gulf. In general, Iraqi Kurdish autonomy held no sway in America's Middle East policy. Particularly in light of burgeoning of U.S.-Iraqi relations, the Iraqi Kurds proved inconsequential to the larger scheme of thwarting Iran and advancing Iraq's military gains in the Gulf. With the U.S. intent on affording Iraq an upper hand in the Iran-Iraq War, the removal of Saddam's regime from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list and the subsequent issuance of U.S. Agriculture Department Commodity Credit guarantees allowed for the sale of chemicals and dual-use technologies to Iraq. In spite of repeated warnings from several of its own governmental agencies, and backed up by UN reports, the U.S. continued to supply Iraq with chemicals and technologies, which Saddam weaponized and utilized on his own citizens, the Iraqi Kurds. Iraq's use of chemical weapons, much of which the United States provided, killed thousands of Iraqi Kurds and made hundreds of Kurdish villages uninhabitable. The extermination of both Iraqi Kurdish villagers and fighters, and the devastation of homes and the countryside wrought by additional aerial bombardments by Iraqi forces, crushed the physical ability and emotional fortitude of Iraqi Kurds to carry on with ambitions for autonomy and an independent state. Although the United States, the UN, and the European Parliament passed resolutions condemning Iraq for its chemical weapons use, no sanctions resulted from such use against Saddam's regime. U.S. policy on Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War constituted a direct threat to the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement. By disregarding the implications of selling dual-use chemicals and technologies to Iraq,

the United States implicated itself, alongside Saddam, in the downfall of the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement.

During the Cold War period from the Nixon era through the Reagan years, U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf region negatively impacted the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement. From exploitative, covert ventures on behalf of Iran to chemical and weapons sales to Iraq, the United States' Gulf policies carelessly and damagingly influenced Iraqi Kurdish ambitions. In devising those policies on behalf of regional powers and capitalizing on Iraqi Kurdish aims, the United States indifferently obstructed the nationalist movement. Although the movement resurfaced in later years with some success, U.S. involvement continued along the same lines of limited support with no overt diplomatic backing. The Kurdish proverb, "The only friends we have are the mountains," holds true.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰³ The Kurdish Project

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